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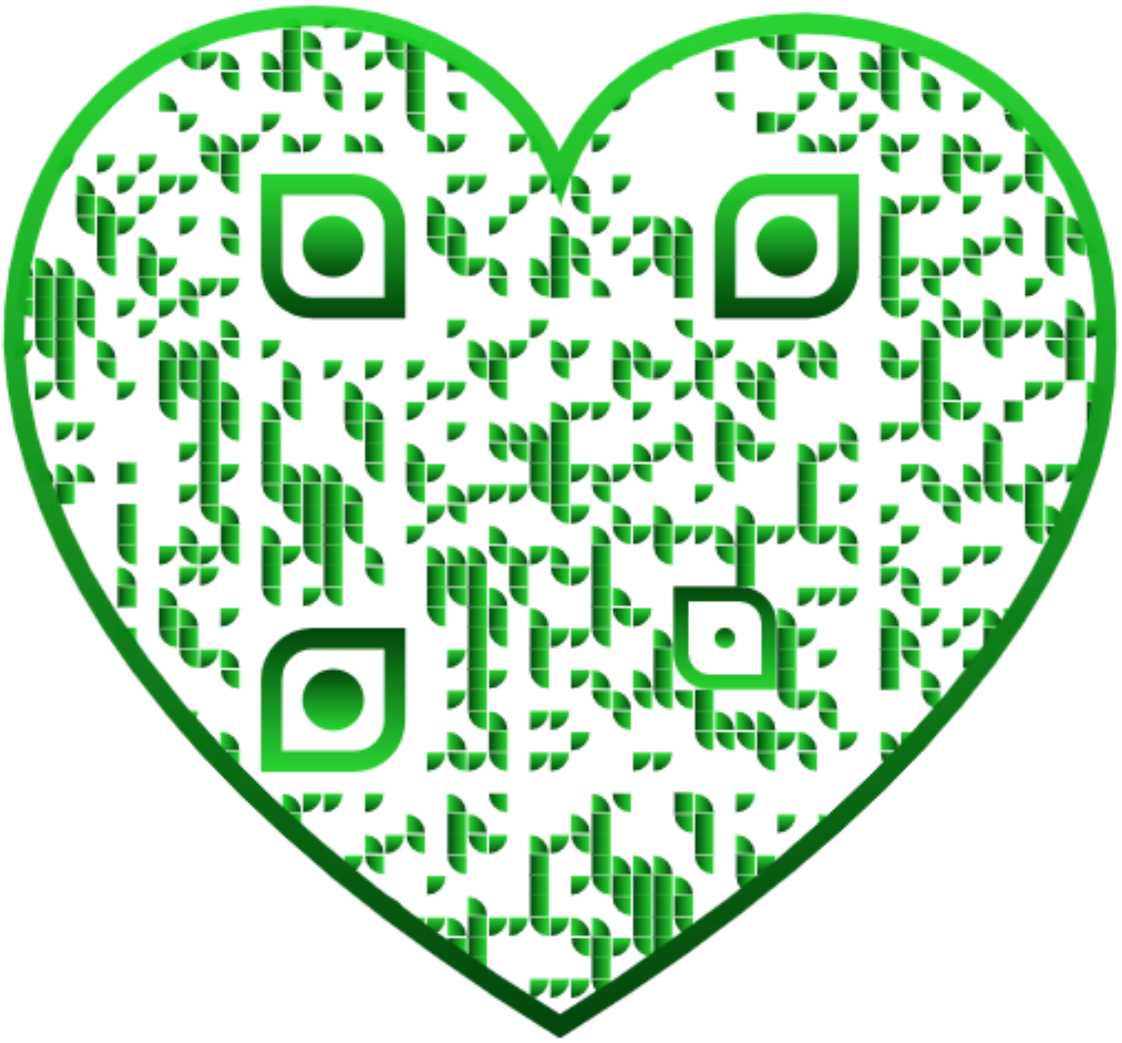

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SONIKKU

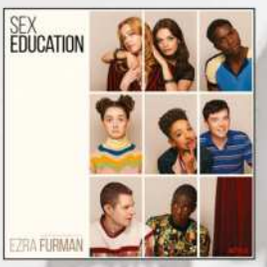
JOYFUL DEATH

Bella Union

EVERYTHING IS RECORDED

FRIDAY FOREVER

XL Recordings



EZRA FURMAN

SEX EDUCATION

(ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK)

Bella Union

REN HARVIEU

REVEL IN THE DRAMA

Bella Union

EDDIE COCHRAN

SOMETHIN' ELSE

Chant Du Monde

BC CAMPLIGHT

SHORTLY AFTER TAKEOFF

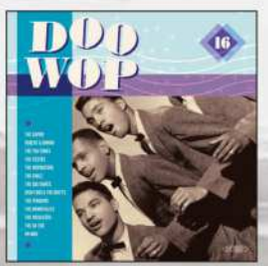
Bella Union

NIGHTMARES ON WAX

SMOKERS DELIGHT

(25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)

Warp



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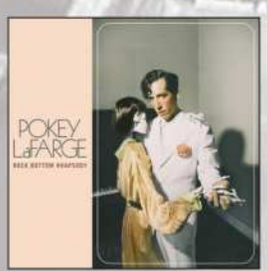
DOO-WOP

Chant Du Monde

WARM DIGITS

FLIGHT OF IDEAS

Memphis Industries



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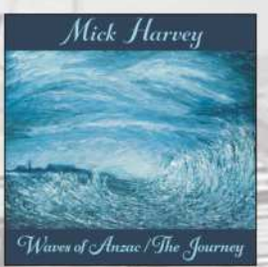


MICK HARVEY

WAVES OF ANZAC/THE JOURNEY

Mute

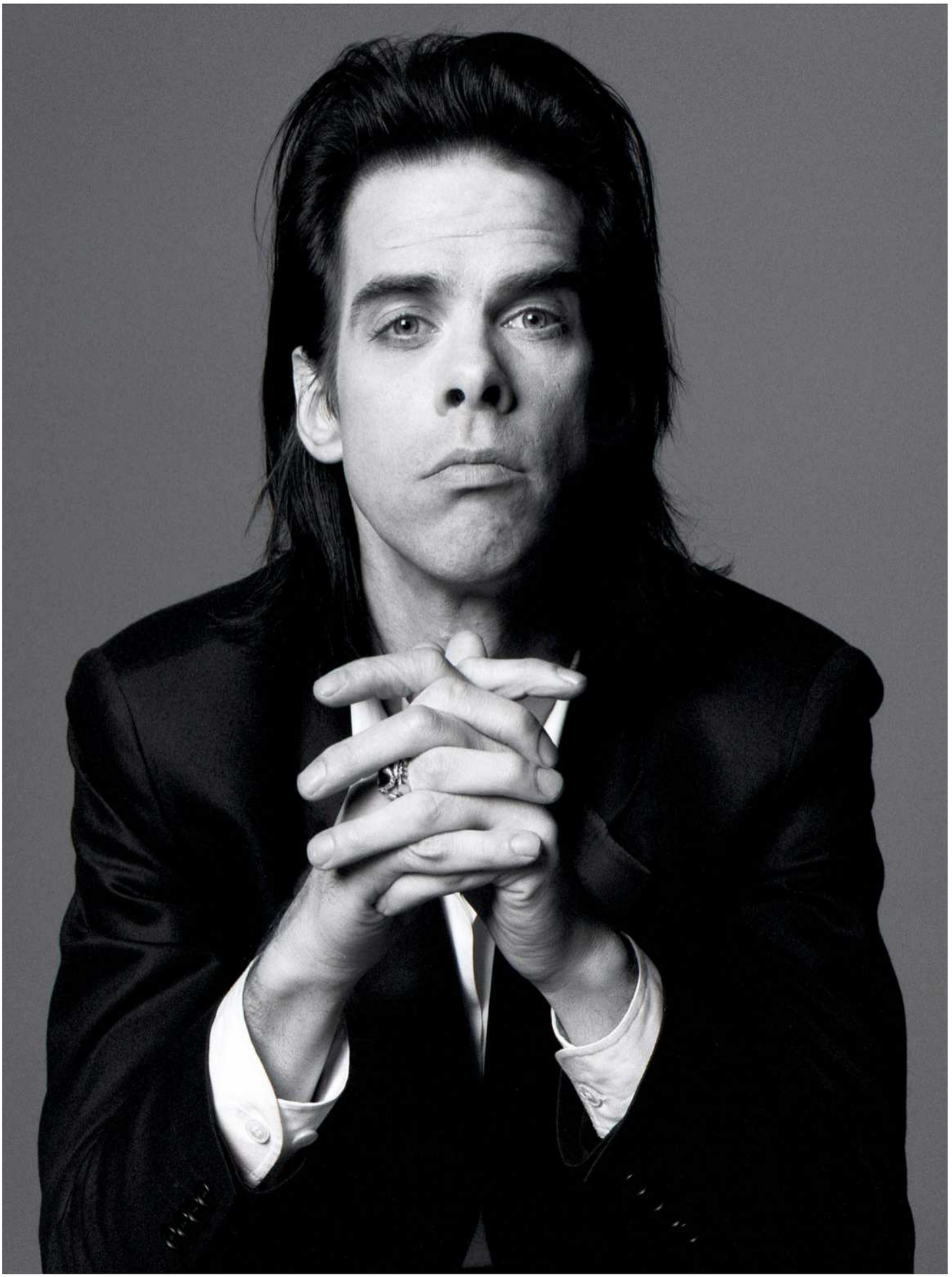
SAVE MONEY
WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE!
TURN TO PAGE 8

Welcome...

"These are challenging times." So says Radiohead guitarist Ed O'Brien in our interview this month as he embarks on a new solo career as EOB with debut album *Earth*. It's a universal sentiment, one which you may already be beginning to tire of hearing as the frightening swirl of news events gathers pace. Life is, I'm sure you've noticed, a bit strange at the moment. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our daily routines in ways we couldn't perceive just months ago. By the time you read these words, things will undoubtedly have moved on significantly since I wrote them, self-isolated at home. I've just said goodbye to Iain from Longwell Records, after he dropped off an album. Leaving it at the door, he retreated to the safety of the end of the drive and we awkwardly shouted our fears for the future, before reaching for the hand sanitiser. With Record Store Day postponed until June and high streets deserted, it's never been more vital to support our local record shops. These independent businesses run on tiny margins, reliant on the unwavering passion of their owners and customers. They are utterly vulnerable to an economic downturn. Make no mistake, this virus could wipe many of them off the map. That's why we're calling on you to do everything you can to help keep business somewhere approaching normality for your local shop. If it's not safe to visit, consider ordering online, or maybe, like Iain, your shop owner will deliver. In the hyper-global world we've embraced, suddenly the importance of hyper-local measures is brought back into focus. For record shops, it was ever thus. They're at the heart of our communities and the simple pleasure of popping in to chat about music and flip through the racks with old friends is under existential threat. Over the past decade, the return of hundreds of vinyl emporiums to our town centres has been truly heartening. I know you'll agree, I don't like the idea of the place I live having nowhere to buy records, so let's not give up without a fight. And as a fairly young magazine, run by a small independent publisher, I need to tell you: it's going to get tough for us, too. Stick with us, in print or online, and we'll do our best to bring some joy to the uncertain days ahead. Enjoy this issue, stay safe, cherish the time to listen to your record collection and, if you can, spend some money at your local shop.

Gary Walker *Editor*

LONGLIVEVINYL



DAVE TONGE/GETTY

LONG LIVE VINYL

EMMA DUDLYKE

SUBS OFFER

SAVE MONEY

WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE!
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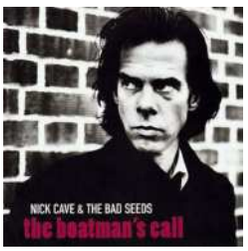
LONG LIVE VINYL

The *Long Live Vinyl* team's favourite Nick Cave



GARY WALKER
The Boatman's Call

GARY TIPP
Push The Sky Away

TILDA HOWARD
Ghosteen

ANDY McGREGOR
Skeleton Tree

IAN PEEL
Where The Wild Roses Grow

Meet our expert contributors…

SIMON RAYMONDE
Simon was the bassist and keyboard player in the Cocteau Twins; he's currently in Lost Horizons. He launched the independent label Bella Union in 1997. His label has been home to bands including Fleet Foxes, The Flaming Lips, Midlake, Father John Misty, John Grant, Explosions In The Sky and Lanterns On The Lake. He's also produced many great albums.

JOHN EARLS
In addition to writing about music for *Classic Pop*, *NME* and *The Daily Star*, John Earls was editor of Teletext's Planet Sound for a decade. He also writes about football, spends too much time on Twitter and is delighted that his new hometown in Bedfordshire has a decent record shop. There's even a bus that goes to Luton Town's ground, so his life is essentially sorted.

HUW BAINES
Huw grew up a snotty punk kid, cribbing The Clash LPs from his dad's stash and haunting the racks at the venerable Spillers Records in Cardiff. He's written about music for a wealth of publications, including *Noisey*, *DIY* and *Guitar Magazine*, among others, and about sport for ESPN, while cultivating a vinyl collection that's challenging the structural integrity of his house.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY
Daniel is a freelance writer based in Sheffield. He writes for *The Guardian*, *VICE*, *Pitchfork*, *Uncut*, *The Quietus*, *Noisey* and several others. He will be forever poor because he spends too much money on records. He can be found playing said records in Sheffield, often making small children cry by playing Einstürzende Neubauten on a Sunday afternoon in a pub.

PETE PAPHIDES
Pete bought his first record at the age of nine and has been a vinyl obsessive ever since, while writing for *Melody Maker*, *Q*, *Mojo*, *Time Out*, *The Times* and *The Guardian*. He is one of the UK's best known music journalists and has also written and presented documentaries for BBC Radio 4 and BBC 6 Music. You can catch him on Soho Radio every Tuesday, 12-2pm.

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On the record

Your local record shop needs you!

Appeal for customers to support under-threat shops as Record Store Day is postponed until June and Coronavirus pandemic hits the high street

Record shops were bracing themselves for the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic as we went to press, with the message loud and clear in the wake of the postponement of Record Store Day until 20 June: support your local shop.

Record Store Day organisers were left with no choice but to put the event back by two months as social distancing and self-isolation measures came into effect. The outbreak has left shops uncertain over their future, with high-street footfall plummeting, but many stressing that they remain open for business – even if that means online or personally delivering to customers.

A spokesperson for Record Store Day said: "Given the challenges now facing the independent record store community, we urge music fans to continue to support their local record shop in whichever way they can to see us through what is about to become a very challenging time. This was absolutely not an easy decision to make, as hundreds of independent shops and labels have been working hard towards this year's celebrations. We're working with all of our partners and our stores to make this change as smooth as possible for everyone: customers, record stores, artists, labels and more. Record Store Day is everywhere and we want to hold our party when everyone can gather around safely to celebrate life, art, music and the culture of the indie record store."

Open for business: Keynsham's Longwell Records are hoping for support from their customers during the COVID-19 outbreak, whether over the counter or online

Beyond the postponement of Record Store Day, the COVID-19 pandemic is a far graver existential threat to our independent record shops. Natasha Youngs at Brighton store Resident Music, and part of the organising team behind Record Store Day, sounded a stark warning: "The moving of Record Store Day isn't what's impacting the shop hardest right now. Dealing with the COVID-19 virus is the single biggest challenge the independent sector has ever faced, and as the high street was already on its knees, this is frankly brutal. If we don't handle this smartly, it could well be the end of high street retail.

"In the circumstances, it's 100% the right decision [to postpone RSD]. It wasn't an easy one and we were keen to make sure all territories were in agreement, but we got there in the end and we all feel more comfortable that we won't be holding the event during what is predicted to be the peak time for the virus spread.

"In all honesty, as the decision was made before we had to commit to any stock orders, we can adjust to a new date easily. Yes, we will need to rearrange the entertainment we had booked and may have to find some alternatives, but this is all very manageable in comparison to everything else we are dealing with.

"At least this year, if it goes ahead in June, it'll be a heck of a lot warmer for those crazy dedicated overnight queuers! It's also not a bad time of year for it to happen in terms of releases, as Easter/April is traditionally quite a busy time for new releases, whereas June is more geared to the festival season, so can be much quieter."

And Youngs underlines the importance of customers digging deep in these troubled times to support their local shop. "What customers can do is continue to shop with us, in store or online, as long as circumstances allow them to."

Union Music's Del Day says he's hopeful his customers' support will see the shop through what's certain to be the toughest time they've known. "I think we, like every store, will feel a real punch. But if we all pull together and help each other out we can get through it I'm sure.

"Financially, Record Store Day is a massive day for a small shop like ours, so we shall have to cut our cloth accordingly and will be really careful with our ordering of regular titles and new releases. We have a wonderful customer base here who love the shop. I'd be hopeful they will keep coming in and buying records! We do mail-order too and are happy to drop albums off to customers if they are unable to attend in person."

Bristol's Friendly Records, meanwhile, are seeing the enforced break as an opportunity, using the time to close their doors and move forward a plan to knock through their bar and shop to create a single space. Elsewhere, other shops are sanitising doorhandles and shelves, providing disposable gloves and offering free delivery in an attempt to stave off the financial threat.

Adam Gillison, of Jumbo Records in Leeds, said trade had already slowed as we went to press. "We have heard the words 'town's quiet today' from more than a few customers. It's all changing quickly and the working from home impact and then indeed the spread of the virus haven't had a chance to really hit us yet. It's difficult to know what to plan for the best.

"The change of date has come early enough for us not to have committed too much, and most of the plans we have made so far are transferable to the new date. In the meantime, we're really hoping that customers will use our website if they can't visit us. We're a physical shop, and that's what people know us as principally, but in the short term it's going to be really important that people use that virtual shop. We're only an email or a phone call away if people want to ask our advice."

Long Live Vinyl **is appealing to readers to support their local store through what will be the most challenging period many of them have ever faced**

At Longwell Records, owner Ian Aitchison says he is fearful of the economic impact of the virus, but has been touched by the reaction from customers already, with the last Saturday before self-isolation measures came into play a busy one. "The biggest fear is all music events being stopped until further notice. In some respects, Record Store Day being pushed back is a good thing, as if it went ahead it would have felt a real gamble taking part due to the virus. We are certainly going to be putting more stock online and Facebook marketplace.

"I'm unsure about Record Store Day in June, but if it goes ahead we will make it a super day at Longwell Records, and it would be mint to have some form of party after coming out from this pretty scary scenario."

Brighton's Resident is preparing for lean times ahead as high street footfall plummets

Discogs

TRENDING CHART

THE TOP 10 TRENDING VINYL RELEASES FROM THE DISCOGS COMMUNITY THIS MONTH

10 *Alabama Song* David Bowie

9 *The Rising* Bruce Springsteen

8 *Texas Sun* Khruangbin

7 *White Ladder* David Gray

6 *Is This It* The Strokes

5 *Ordinary Man* Ozzy Osbourne

4 *Miss Anthropocene* Grimes

3 *We're New Again* Gil Scott-Heron

2 *Aretha Now* Aretha Franklin

1 *I'll Sleep When You're Dead* El-P

Official Vinyl Albums Chart

APRIL 2020

10 *Rumours* Fleetwood Mac

9 *Nevermind* Nirvana

8 *Back To Black* Amy Winehouse

7 *Bridge Over Troubled Water* Simon & Garfunkel

6 *Heavy Is The Head* Stormzy

5 *Man Alive* King Krule

4 *White Ladder* David Gray

3 *Miss Anthropocene* Grimes

2 *Ordinary Man* Ozzy Osbourne

1 *The Slow Rush* Tame Impala

Work In Progress

KELLY LEE OWENS

INNER SONG **SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND** 1 MAY

My new album is... called *Inner Song*, the music was written and recorded over a 35-day period. With this album, I allowed the ideas to flow more freely. On the previous release, I would try to produce and sculpt the sounds before I was able to let the idea fully flourish, which creates something else, but with this one the ideas were fully respected and formed. Then I went on and produced/automated everything within an inch of its life, which is fun for me!

The sessions... took place between Daniel Avery's London studio and a studio in Margate for vocal recording/final production sessions. Both studios are very close to water, either the river or the sea, and sub-aqua elements seem to flow through the sound of my music.

I worked with... James Greenwood again. We co-wrote and co-produced the music together, then I went away to write all the lyrics and vocal melodies. I went on to mix the album with Cherif Hashizume, who's worked as Jon Hopkins' studio engineer for about 12 years. I also ended up getting my album mastered by Guy Davie, another longtime collaborator of Jon's. Jon has been very generous in introducing me to his talented team of trusted people and also generous in offering me a hand when I need one. For example, when I needed to decide on which master to use for the final album (I had amended the master four times in one week!). Jon allowed me to use his studio very late at night to listen in on his incredible speakers (which he's mixed the last two albums of his on). The following day, thanks to him, I was able to sign off on the album!

I used... (mainly) the Korg Mono/Poly, Roland SH-101, Roland 808, Doepfer Dark Time sequencer, a LOT of the Soundtoys 'Crystallizer' plug-in and a great Neumann mic that George Michael recorded *Faith* on (the actual one!). I wanted the vocals this time to be on top in the mix, with lots more clarity in the production, instead of hiding behind waves of Space Echo delay and oceans of reverb! Kieran Hebden (Four Tet) encouraged me to whack my vocals up in the mix when it came to making album two!

I was inspired... by a lot of what had gone on in my personal life, the healing journey I had gone through inwardly and how I wanted to re-wild/recover my spirit and creative life. Hopefully transmuting something from pain to beauty that can continue to connect and inspire people.

I learnt... to be patient with myself, to trust myself fully in my ideas, to push for the nuanced detail in the sound, and more than ever to be open, honest and a little more direct in my lyric writing.

Playing these songs live... is yet to happen! I have live dates lined up from May onwards and I am so excited for people to hear everything come alive! Live is a whole other world, which I love bringing people into sonically and visually.

You'd be surprised to know that...
I use a lot of my own organic samples. Mainly using a Shure MV88 condenser mic that plugs in to my iPhone, so it's fully portable. This means that any sound that inspires me, I can capture and use as the basis for a track, which is limitless!

Lost Shops

#11 DON CHRISTIE, BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham has produced some of the UK's foremost reggae bands – Steel Pulse, UB40 and The Beat among them – and they (and pretty much everyone else interested in Jamaican music) shopped at Don Christie Records over the three decades-plus it was open. Don Christie opened as a specialist Blue Beat shop in the mid-1960s. With the UK label Blue Beat being the main source of ska, people often referred to the new dance music as "blue beat". Don Christie was a white man who embraced the new sound and never looked back, continuing to ride the changes in black music, specifically Jamaican. 'The Reggae Specialist' was painted across the shop's red and white frontage. Originally on Ladypoole Road, Balsall Heath, Don Christie's was a long, rectangular shop. Those who encountered Christie remember him as very personable and Robin Campbell (of UB40) recalls ganja openly being smoked in the shop while music boomed through the speakers. In the early 1980s, Christie sold the shop to his staff. This led to the new owners shifting Don Christie's to 12 Gloucester Street, so becoming part of the famous Bull Ring shopping centre in the heart of the city. There, they opened a basement department specialising in dance music. DJs would buy house, especially jungle and drum & bass, while upstairs remained reggae, dancehall, dub, soul and rap. As with many reggae and dance music shops, sadly, downloads did for Don Christie's earlier this century.

Garth Cartwright

KIM HIORTHØY

Simon says

SIMON RAYMONDE

Simon remembers the time he had the opportunity to produce a number of tracks on a posthumous album for one of his musical idols – Billy Mackenzie

Assuming I were to drop dead tomorrow, which let's face it in the current state of apocalypse wouldn't be such a surprise, I'd still feel that I had lived a pretty charmed life. Being in a band with Elizabeth Fraser for 14 years, before developing the roster at Bella Union for the last 23, has fuelled this old man's tank many times over, and then add working with Scott Walker for his BBC Proms celebration in 2017 and I have more stored reserves than I think I will ever need.

However, back in 1997, before Bella Union had even released its first album, an opportunity arose for me to work on a record by a man who, like Scott Walker, was blessed with a voice that was once-in-a-generation.

It was a strange time. Elizabeth had phoned me to say she couldn't carry on with the band any longer, and as the news began to sink in that my beloved Cocteau Twins were really no more, I got a call out of the blue asking if I would be interested in producing some tracks that the incredible Billy Mackenzie had started before he died tragically earlier that year.

I had idolised Billy when he was singer in The Associates, so you can imagine how I felt when I actually met him back in the Beggars Banquet record shop where I had just started work in 1981, aged 18! I was genuinely star-struck.

The Associates had recently signed to Situation Two, a label run by Peter Kent, which had its office upstairs from the record shop where I worked with Pete's brother Steve. My first band, The Drowning Craze, had also just signed to the label, so maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised to meet Billy when he came into the shop, but despite my shyness, he was an absolute gentleman to me and whenever he came in would ask me to take his beloved whippets out for a walk in the neighbourhood while he was upstairs meeting with the label. As my family had always had dogs, he probably saw in me a kindred spirit.

Billy truly loved his dogs as much as his music and was also a famous breeder of whippets back home in Auchterhouse, a village north west of Dundee. Indeed, so keen a breeder that he had his own bloodline of whippet called the MacArthur, which was Billy's second name. And I feel he was certainly happier talking about his dogs than his music.

The Associates, in their original pairing of Billy and Alan Rankine, didn't stay together for long sadly, but they left behind some extraordinary music – the *White Car In Germany* EP and in fact all of their releases on Situation Two, but most notably the album *Sulk,* which came out a year later in 1982 on Beggars Banquet.

Sulk is always in any list of 'My Favourite Albums', whether that be 50 albums or five! It signalled a future for pop music that was daring and artistic, bold and sophisticated without ever being overcooked. It was wildly ambitious and probably too brilliant for its time, but no doubt ABC, Heaven 17 and many, many more young bands swooned in its shadow. In fact, it should have been on a label called Beggars Belief!

Sulk is always in any list of 'My Favourite Abums', whether that be 50 or five

The sessions for the posthumous album, which I arranged at our studio September Sound later in 1997, were special and yet strange. Not being able to turn around and ask Billy what he thought about the way a particular song was going during the process was very odd, and initially disconcerting, but somehow I always felt his guiding hand and his blessing to what I was doing.

I would occasionally walk across Old Richmond Park on the way to the studios in the morning and it must have been a day or so after we finished, that I was strolling towards the footbridge at Richmond Lock when this gang of assorted dogs was trundling past with their walker, and this little grey whippet stopped and turned towards me. I could have sworn he smiled at me.

Steve Aungle, his co-writer on many of the pieces, was a wonderful presence throughout the process. It was also a huge thrill for me having Malcolm Ross in to play on a few pieces. Malcolm was the original guitarist in one of the most innovative Scottish bands of the early 80s, Josef K, and also went on to play with Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, all bands I absolutely loved. What a brilliant guitarist!

I ended up producing six of the tracks on the album *Beyond The Sun* that Nude released, but all the credit has to go to Billy and Steve. Without their pieces, there's no record. It was one of the greatest honours of my life to date.

The album was recently reissued by One Little Indian, so I hope a new audience will continue to discover the majesty of Billy's work long into the future. ●

The Selecter

Long Live Vinyl's essential picks for the month ahead

JERN 14 ES SPEAKERS

£TBC

www.jernspeakers.com

They may be shaped like Russian dolls and look unlikely to fill your living room with glorious hi-fi sound, but the Danish company's unique cast iron and graphite speakers have blown our tiny minds. The 14 ES' diminutive frame belies the high-quality, widescreen sound it can produce. Give them a try.

BLUEDOT 2020

£175

www.discoverthebluedot.com

Taking place beneath the gaze of the huge Lovell telescope, Bluedot festival is a collision of music, science and comedy. This year's bill includes Bjork, BEAK> and Spiritualized, alongside all sorts of space-related shenanigans. It was still on at time of going to press.

VINYL WINGS

£39.99

www.vinylwings.co.uk

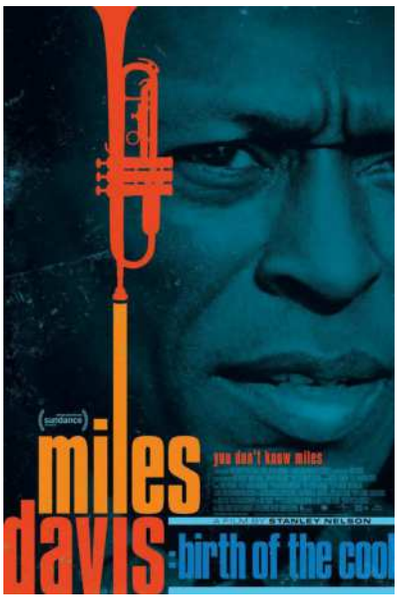
Vinyl Wings subscribers get two records each month carefully picked from their chosen genre, delivered to their door.

TAKE ON ME MERCHANDISE

From £9.99

www.store.rhino.co.uk

To celebrate *Take On Me* reaching one billion streams on YouTube, Rhino has launched a range of limited edition a-ha merchandise, including vinyl, a VHS tape, exclusive prints signed by the band and sketches by animators Michael Patterson and Candace Reckinger.



MILES DAVIS: BIRTH OF THE COOL DOCUMENTARY

£Free

www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer

We've all got a lot more time on the sofa planned for the foreseeable future, so treat yourself to this documentary on the great jazz pioneer, now streaming on BBC iplayer, featuring never-before-seen archival footage and studio outtakes.

BROKEN RECORD PODCAST

£Free

www.brokenrecordpodcast.com

Hosted by Rick Rubin, Malcolm Gladwell and Justin Richmond, Broken Record bills itself as "liner notes for the digital age". It's a deep dive into music history, with guests including Robbie Robertson, Ozzy Osbourne and Run The Jewels.

The Completist

PETE PAPHIDES

While most collectors fume at the sight of biro messages inscribed on sleeves, such scribbles can add to the value of a record in other ways

"Why do people do that?" exclaimed the guy in the record shop, disapprovingly. Someone had written on the back of Sadé's third album, *Stronger Than Pride*, thus diminishing its resale value. "JULY – 1988," read the dedication, "To Kim, See you in Nice, With love, Rich. xxxxx". Just because I could appreciate the record shop guy's frustration, it didn't mean I agreed with it.

A lot of collectors will hold out for a Mint condition copy of a desired album. To them, a biro inscription hovering above Sadé's right shoulder is an act of vandalism. Possibly the difference between them and me is mere nosiness. What was the deal with Rich and Kim? And why Nice? Did one of them live there? Had they even met in person? Perhaps they were pen-pals and this Sadé album represents a mutual decision to take their relationship beyond the realm of correspondence.

A record with an inscription on it is like a page torn out of a diary. It mattered enough to act as a vessel into which one person's feelings for another were placed. But then something changed. And because we only have one page of that diary, we'll never know what it was. That might diminish the monetary value of a record, but it increases it in other ways.

I know I'm not the only person who feels this way, because it was a topic I raised on Twitter recently, and received a delightful deluge of photos from people with similarly tantalising inscriptions on their records. There's something beautifully unfiltered about the copy of The Jam's *Absolute Beginners* single which simply reads "One whole year – doesn't time fly by when you're having fun. I LOVE YOU. xxxxx" – and reminds me of the protagonist in another song by The Jam, *Monday*, who is similarly unguarded about their feelings for the subject of his adoration: "But a sunshine girl like you/ It's worth going through/ I will never be embarrassed about love again". Another correspondent sent me a photo of his copy of *The White Album*, which told a somewhat different story. "To my darling Sue, with all my love, Eddie", read one inscription. Then, written on top of it, in different handwriting: "Many Happy Returns Dave, Love Sue XXX" – suggesting this might have been the Sue who inspired Dion & The Belmonts' jukebox classic.

When I was 12, I remember visiting the house of my parents' friends Nick and Maria. Like my parents, Nick and Maria ran a chip shop. Most evenings, their oldest son – Nick Jr – also worked there. When Nick Jr saw me rifling through his records, he saw me pull out a pair of 12-inches, Frantique's *Strut Your Funky Stuff* and Lipps Inc's *Funkytown*.

Now that Nick Jr was manning the fryer, he had no need of such juvenilia. "I don't have time to listen to that stuff any more," he explained, as he handed them over to me. Even if he hadn't lovingly applied his name onto the labels using a standard-issue Helix alphabet stencil, I would still associate both records with him. What would Nick Jr say now if I appeared at his door and re-presented him with these imperiously magnificent slivers of dancefloor manna? Would he still say he had no use for them? Or would he realise a significant proportion of the person he tried to will away in the rush to adulthood is sealed in the grooves of those records?

A record with an inscription on it is like a page torn out of a diary

Pete Paphides is a music journalist, record collector and broadcaster. Catch him on Soho Radio every Tuesday, 12-2pm

Herein lies the bittersweet dichotomy of human beings and their relationship to records. We fall in love – be it with the music or with a person who we associate with the music – and we want it to be forever. But sometimes it's not. Vinyl, on the other hand, can weather several thousand of rotations. Almost all records outlive the feelings and, indeed, the human beings who welcome them into their story.

Most of the time I spend in second-hand record shops, that doesn't enter my thoughts. But then you happen upon another inscription. The Sylvester and Patrick Cowley 12-inch bearing the message "May your life be miserable without me." The Labi Siffre album which Richard urges Caroline to place on the turntable on 11pm on 13 November whilst looking up at the moon, adding that, at the same time, he'll be doing that, too.

In the aforementioned Twitter thread, one correspondent popped up to say that in the 80s, his girlfriend found a copy of Nick Drake's *Fruit Tree* boxset for "just a few quid" in a Bournemouth junk shop. Written on it was the somewhat desperate entreaty, "perhaps you'll understand me a little better now." It's a heartbreaking thing to write on any record, let alone one by Nick Drake. Did its intended recipient even listen to it? Did they drop the needle onto *Hazey Jane I* and hear him plaintively inquire, "Do you feel like a remnant of something that's past?" Or did they just dispense with it and the lover who gave it to them, in the process turning both into remnants of something that's past? ●

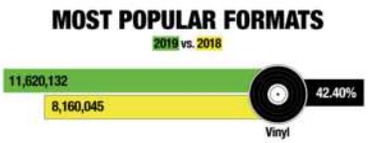
Vinyl's reign continues...

Discogs report underlines format's growing appeal, while CDs slump

Vinyl consolidated its position as the dominant format on Discogs last year, with 695,201 new submissions to the database during the year, up from 552,534 in 2018. By contrast, CD submissions dropped by 3%. The cassette revival gathered pace for reasons we know not, soaring by 70% in 12 months. The new figures were released in Discogs' annual report and make for encouraging reading in these uncertain times. There were 11.6 million vinyl sales on the platform, a massive 42% rise, while 1.8m CDs were also shifted (-19%). The UK remains the second biggest marketplace on Discogs, behind the US, with 140,150 releases added in 2019.

Unsurprisingly, the broadly defined 'rock' remains the most popular genre for new submissions and sales, with pop second, narrowly ahead of electronic, and funk, world and country bracketed together in fourth place. Jazz and pop both saw huge uplifts in sales at 18% and 17% respectively. The most expensive sale on the site in 2019 was a rare copy of The Beatles' *Love Me Do*, which fetched a very tidy $9,102. Copies of Röyksopp's limited edition *Melody AM* album with a stencil cover designed by Banksy filled second and fourth place at $7,914 and $7,051 respectively, either side of a copy of the Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen* A&M 7-inch.

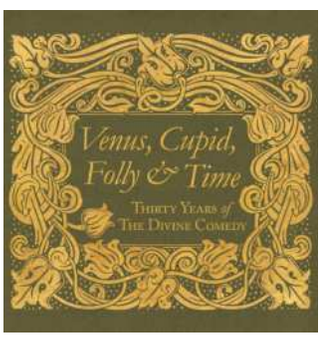
There are very few surprises when it comes to most collected master releases, with Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon* taking top spot, ahead of The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, boosted by the album's 50th anniversary. The rest of the Top 10 was made up entirely of albums by Floyd, the Fab Four, Michael Jackson, Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin. The most popular new album sold was Pearl Jam's *MTV Unplugged* recording, with The Doors, Depeche Mode and Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds also featuring in the Top 10.



Vinyl sales on the site soared by 42% in 2019 according to Discogs' Year End Report

15,000

The price (£) an original UK London stock copy of Darrell Banks' *Open The Door To Your Heart* sold for in a recent Omega Auctions rare records sale.

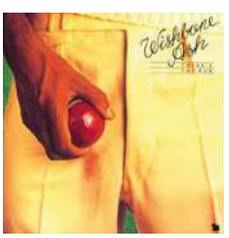


PURE COMEDY

The Divine Comedy will celebrate their 30th anniversary with the reissue of nine of their albums in August. *Liberation, Promenade, Casanova, A Short Album About Love, Fin de Siècle, Regeneration, Absent Friends, Victory For The Comic Muse and Bang Goes The Knighthood* have been remastered at Abbey Road.

4 OF A KIND... Acronyms

THE HEARTBREAKERS
LAMF
The LP title aped New York street gang graffiti. In full, D.T.K.L.A.M.F stands for Down to kill like a mother fucker.



WISHBONE ASH
FUBB
The Ash caused a stir with 1974's *There's The Rub*'s album track *FUBB*, which in full translates as fucked up beyond belief.

MGMT
TSLAMP
The acronym used on 2018's *Little Dark Age* LP stands for the first world problem: 'time spent looking at my phone'.

SLEAFORD MODS
OBCT
Oliver Bonas Chelsea Tractor reveals the guilt that their 'gentrification' has had on the band's world outlook.

Coming Soon...

OUR PICK OF THE UPCOMING VINYL RELEASES

17 APRIL

Enter Shikari, *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible* (SO Recordings); Gregory Porter, *All Rise* (UMC); EOB, *Earth* (Capitol); Nicole Atkins, *Italian Ice* (Single Lock); Ron Sexsmith, *Hermitage* (Warner)

24 APRIL

Braids, *Shadow Offering* (Secret City); Brendan Benson, *Dear Life* (Third Man); HAIM, *Women In Music Pt. III* (Columbia); Indigo Girls, *Look Long* (Rounder Records); LA Priest, *GENE* (Domino); Other Lives, *For Their Love* (ATO); Robby Krieger, *The Ritual Begins At Sundown* (Players Club); Rufus Wainwright, *Unfollow The Rules* (BMG); The 1975, *Notes On A Conditional Form* (Polydor); Trivium, *What The Dead Men Say* (Roadrunner)

1 MAY

Built To Spill, *Plays The Songs Of Daniel Johnston* (Ernest Jenning); Car Seat Headrest, *Making A Door Less Open* (Matador); Damien Jurado, *What's New Tomboy?* (Loose Music); Diet Cig, *Do You Wonder About Me?* (Frenchkiss); JARV IS... *Beyond The Pale* (Rough Trade); Kelly Lee Owens, *Inner Song* (Smalltown Supersound); Lemon Twigs, *Songs For The General Public* (4AD); Psychedelic Furs, *Made Of Rain* (Cooking Vinyl)

8 MAY

Jenny Beth, *To Love Is To Live* (Caroline); Mark Lanegan, *Straight Songs Of Sorrow* (Heavenly)

IAN PEEL'S

THE ART OF THE 12"

This month, Ian and The Beloved's Jon Marsh take a deep dive into classic 12"s by The Human League, Joyce Sims and Imagination, before flying off on a remix album tangent

Last month, I started to talk to various musicians about their favourite 80s 12" singles. And, if you had to limit yourself to just three choices, which would you pick? This month, I called Jon Marsh of The Beloved and talked in depth about his own personal top three.

1. The Human League – Hard Times/Love Action

"This was the first time I'd heard a deconstructed pop record reconfigured specifically for clubs. Effectively a remix, although it is entirely comprised of the same parts as the 7" version. The producer, Martin Rushent, was an absolute visionary genius. The similar work he did with Hard Corps, Altered Images and Pete Shelley are equally brilliant, but the League records came first and were game-changers. *Blue Monday* owes a huge and unacknowledged debt to these records."

2. Joyce Sims – (You Are My) All & All

"I was already a massive fan of Mantronix, whose debut album dropped in 1985, but then this incredible record materialised the following year. A Kurtis Mantronik production married to Joyce Sims' voice and superior songwriting – freestyle, hip-hop soul music that worked in a song arrangement/radio mix but stretched out over a 12" with amazing tricksy edits by the Latin Rascals. Mind-blowing and groundbreaking! I still get a frisson of excitement when I hear it: synth stabs, clattering beats, amazing syncopation. Then, of course, *Come Into My Life* followed and is probably the better record, certainly better known, but it finessed the genius of this track and didn't have that 'shock-of-the-new' impact."

3. Imagination – Music & Lights

"I could pick any of their massive hits, which all had radio-friendly short versions but which really come into their own on extended 12" mixes. Such pared-down production, but sonically perfect: every sound, every beat, every vocal part lock together to create a perfect hybrid of pop and club. This just happens to be my favourite of theirs and the production is so strong you can play it out in 2020 and it holds its own."

Joyce Sims aside, Jon's choices are also at the heart of a related genre, that I once called – in the sleeve notes to a reissue of Propaganda's *Wishful Thinking* compilation of 12" mixes – the 'remixalbum', describing it as "a lost art form, one of the formats and musical styles that made the middle of the 80s quite different from any time before or since."

Other classics of the 'remixalbum' genre had already been released by the time *Wishful Thinking* was created, with 1982 being the flashpoint. Soft Cell's *Non Stop Ecstatic Dancing*, The Human League's *Love And Dancing* and Imagination's *Night Dubbing* are all acclaimed pop-dub masterpieces, and all appeared a matter of months from each other.

But why could these releases be deemed 'remixalbums', not simply 'remix albums'? Because they were full-length, cohesive, brand new works, rather than just compilations of disparate mixes. Which means that, in the years that have followed, Pet Shop Boys' *Disco*, Yello's *The New Mix In One Go* and Eurythmics' *Touch Dance* could all definitely be called 'remixalbums', whereas Howard Jones' *The 12" Album*, Madonna's *You Can Dance* and Bronski Beat's *Hundreds & Thousands* (love them all, as I do) must, I'm afraid, be termed merely 'remix albums'. ●

"I get a frisson of excitement when I hear it. Synth stabs, clattering beats..."

THE VINYLIST HARVEY SMITH

Prince. Led Zep. 80s hair metal… Harvey is living the dream

What was the first record you bought?
"Perhaps not the coolest choice, but it was *Break My Stride* by Matthew Wilder, which was a big hit in 1984 when I was 13. One has to start somewhere, and it wasn't too long before I graduated to U2, Springsteen… and then 80s hair metal took hold."

Which artists and genres are you most interested in?
"My tastes are varied, from rock to soul, jazz, folk, blues and country. I definitely have a healthy obsession with all things Prince, to the extent I've managed to track down many of his Paisley Park and wider associated acts, such as Jill Jones, Sheila E and those early Wendy And Lisa albums on vinyl. I'm also steadily building a collection of classic-period Blue Note jazz, which are things of beauty on vinyl and sound sensational."

How many records do you have?
"I fell into the dreaded trap of selling almost all of my records at a car boot sale during the CD era. I regret it to this day, but have been fortunate enough to replace almost all of them and have now amassed 1,040 vinyl albums. I catalogue them using the Discogs app, which is very intuitive and highly recommended given that it also tracks the estimated value of your collection. I store them A-Z by artist name, but also have 120 albums in my living room, which is the core collection I simply could not live without!"

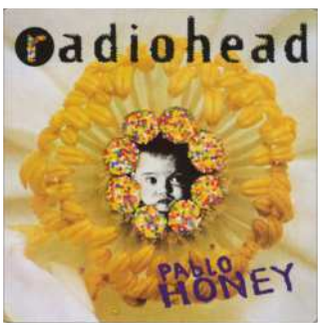
What's the most valuable record in your collection?
"I'm interested in the music rather than viewing my collection as an investment vehicle. However, it's nice to know that my Record Store Day copy of Jeff Tweedy's *Warmer* and also the much sought after Black Friday release of Pearl Jam's *MTV Unplugged* are holding their value at up to £100 each."

What's the holy grail record that you'd most like to own?
"It's got to be a Mint or unplayed copy of the Bob Ludwig master of *Led Zeppelin II*. I love the stories about that pressing being so lively it often made the needle jump out of the record grooves. It's possibly an urban myth, but I'll take my chances."

What's your listening setup?
"I have two systems, both vinyl-based. My main system is a Rega Planar 6 turntable, Audio-Technica VM 750SH cartridge, Rega Brio 2017 amp and Monitor Audio Silver 200 speakers. It's an incredibly musical system and has me playing record after record. My study room system is a 1995 Rega Planar 2, Ortofon 2M Blue cartridge, Cambridge Audio preamp into Edifier active speakers, which is a very nice small room system. You can get your hands on a superb vinyl setup for not much outlay these days. Great news for music fans!"

MOST VALUABLE VINYL

99



RADIOHEAD
PABLO HONEY
1993 UK 12-track vinyl LP, including *Creep* and *Anyone Can Play Guitar*, picture sleeve with illustrated credits inner. PCS7360.
£100

THE CURE
THE LOVE CATS
Scarce 1983 UK Fiction label limited edition two-track 7" picture disc single. It features *Speak My Language* on the flipside. FICSP19.
£50

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
MURDER BALLADS
1996 UK 10-track LP, including *Where The Wild Roses Grow* with Kylie Minogue and *Henry Lee* with PJ Harvey, picture sleeve with fold-out lyric insert & picture discography. STUMM138.
£125

BIG STAR
#1 RECORD/RADIO CITY
1978 UK 24-track double LP on Stax, repackaging the first two cult albums from Alex Chilton's band from 1972-73 and released for the first time in the UK, laminated gatefold picture sleeve. SXSP302.
£50

Now Spinning

12 tracks we're enjoying this month, along with a can of Arbor's big daddy, the mighty Yakima Valley

Interstellar Love **Thundercat** (Brainfeeder)
Ode To The Mets **The Strokes** (Cult)
Hurry On Sundown **Hawkwind** (Atomhenge)
Back To Work **BC Camplight** (Bella Union)
White Line Fever **The Fall** (Cherry Red)
Who Ever Said **Pearl Jam** (Monkey Wrench)
Spirit Me Away **Ren Harvieu** (Bella Union)
I Love My Dogs **Cat Stevens** (UMC)
Cloak Of The Night **EOB** (Capitol)
Unreal City **M Ward** (Anti-)
The Scorcher **Errol Dunkley** (Trojan)
Whitstable Beach **Jack Hues** (Dawn Chorus)

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY

Retelling stories

Charlatans reissue campaign on the way

The Charlatans are planning a reissue campaign for the end of the year. The releases will follow singer Tim Burgess' new solo album *I Love The New Sky*, which is released on 22 May. Burgess told *Long Live Vinyl*: "I've been archiving Charlatans tapes and other material for a reissue series at the end of the year. We're looking at including some unreleased things, so I've been going through the demos and rehearsal tapes."

The campaign will mark 30 years since The Charlatans' debut album *Some Friendly* was released on Beggars subsidiary Situation Two. That label folded shortly after second album *Between 10th And 11th* was released in 1992, when The Charlatans became part of the main Beggars group. The band have also released on Universal, Sanctuary and Cooking Vinyl, while their most recent albums – *Modern Nature* from 2015 and 2017's *Different Days* – were on BMG. Their 2008 album, *You Cross My Path,* famously became the first LP to be given away online by a major artist. Speaking of the co-ordination required to get a full campaign underway, Burgess said: "A lot of deals have to be done for the songs that are out. Luckily, I'm concentrating on the songs that haven't been released that we've found!" There will be a full interview with Tim Burgess in the next issue of *LLV*.

do you have a record collection to sell?

top prices paid for vinyl LPs, 12"s, 7"s, singles, EPs, CDs,

autographs, music memorabilia, concert programmes & more

posters, handbills, tickets, picture discs,

coloured vinyl records, box sets, limited editions

pop. rock. metal. prog. punk. jazz. blues. folk. classical

from the '50s. '60s. '70s. '80s. '90s. '00s

single items or entire collections wanted

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rare records

CRAVEN FAULTS

The mystery producer has delivered a mesmerising debut album inspired by the post-industrial landscapes of northern Britain

The true identity of the artist recording under the name Craven Faults is cloaked in secrecy. What we do know, however, is that the modular synth master has released three highly regarded EPs (known collectively as the *Lowfold Works Trilogy*) and a compelling debut album, *Erratics & Unconformities*, which hit the racks earlier this year via the ever-excellent Leaf Label.

To add to the scant autobiographical detail on offer, we also know that Craven Faults started making music in late 2016, but as a concept it had been bubbling under for some time. "There was a kind of gestation period before that for three or four years as the music took form and shape and I began to formulate ideas and develop a sound and style."

It's believed that the producer/musician works from a disused textile mill somewhere in Yorkshire. Which is something we tentatively asked the artist to confirm via the guarded anonymity of an email exchange. "Yes, my studio occupies a small room in what was once a textile mill. The building isn't disused as such, though some of it is empty, much of it has been put to other use. When I moved in four years ago, there was still textile manufacturing taking place here."

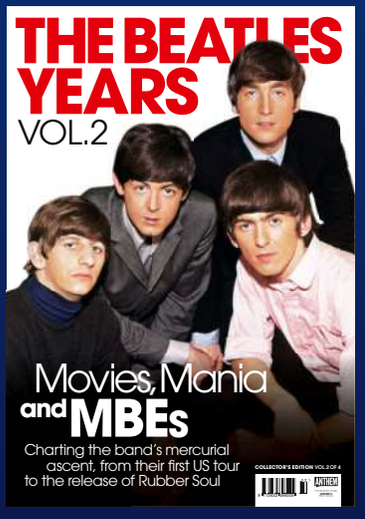
A sense of place seems important, and all of Craven Faults' recorded output of shimmering, evocative electronica relates, certainly via the titles on the tracklistings, to the post-industrial landscape of northern Britain. "I have always had an interest in my surroundings, the history and the geography of a place, wherever I am. I'm not sure how much a sense of place informs the creation of the music, it isn't something I'm always conscious of when I'm in the studio doing it, but I think it's always there in the back of my mind."

But can the landscapes of northern Britain provide an endless well of inspiration for an artist? "There's always more information and inspiration to unearth. There are still many aspects I haven't looked into yet. The hills I see on my journey to the studio have evidence of Neolithic habitation, cup and ring marked rocks, etc, ancient routes and pathways. Landscape and industrial archaeology have interested me for many years, I imagine I'll continue to be inspired by it."

So, how vital is it that the music is attached to a narrative aspect? "For me, it's important that the music flows, and that the details work well. I want everything to fit together so that both individual tracks and groups of tracks start, progress and end with a sense of purpose. The music has a kind of negative space that can be filled by the listener's imagination. I'm not necessarily thinking of a narrative that is defined in any way, more of something that is interpretive."

Clearly, operating under a blanket of anonymity creates a pervading sense of mystery, but it does have some drawbacks, as the anonymous artist behind Craven Faults reveals when touching on plans for the rest of 2020. "Hopefully there will be some new music later this year. There are quite a few unreleased tracks, a lot of unfinished ideas, and I'll work on some new pieces, too, figure out what I've got and what works together. There are plans to play live this year, if I can work out how to do it!" ***Gary Tipp***

THE BEATLES YEARS 1960 – 1970



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CRATE DIGGING WITH... MR SCRUFF

With his 31-track DJ Kicks mix out on 27 March, the acclaimed producer and DJ rifles through his collection and picks 10 choice cuts

MATTHEW HALSALL
INTO FOREVER
"Probably my favourite Matthew Halsall album. My highlights are the tracks featuring Josephine Oniyama. I love her voice, and here she reaches another level. Spiritual, elemental, soulful and stunning."

EBO TAYLOR
EBO TAYLOR
"Beautiful funky highlife with astounding horn parts, which remind me a lot of Fred Wesley's Parliament arrangements, nimble, fruity, tricky and unmistakably his own. The pure joy that radiates out from this wonderful album is truly infectious."

DRYMBAGO
TONNAU
"High-energy tropical throwdown from the Equatorial region of North Wales. A proper knees-up session if Sofrito, Soundway or Pigbag are up your street. I play at least a couple of tunes off this album at every gig and mayhem always ensues."

DOBIE
WE WILL NOT HARM YOU
"Tough, forward-thinking album from original B-Boy Dobie Campbell. I love the way that his hip-hop roots show through on every track, even though the album is so varied. *Somewhere Over There* is an unexpected beauty."

ERRORSMITH
SUPERLATIVE FATIGUE
"Impish, playful dance floor workouts, pulling Afro-Caribbean rhythms, pinging, fizzing and bouncing in all directions, while managing to be both ruthlessly efficient and full of joy and humour. A wild ride."

PREETAMBALA & CHARANJIT CHAN
BABE DA TAL KHARKANI AAN
"Top-notch Panjabi folk music. The vocal chemistry between these two on this album is infectious, and the music, written by the legendary K.S. Narula, has a really propulsive, almost skanking rhythm in parts, especially on *Churey Wali Naar Da*."

THEO PARRISH
SOUND SCULPTURES VOLUME 1
"Probably my favourite TP album, with some absolute killers on here. The jazzy, heads-down *Second Chances*, disembodied *Soul Control* and the abstract pointy beast *Synthetic Flemm* are all anthems to me."

EQUIKNOXX
BIRD SOUND POWER
"Tough, minimal abstract dancehall with a sense of humour. *A Rabbit Spoke To Me When I Woke Up* tickles in double time percussion for a woozy footwork flavour. Full of modern influences but out on its own. File alongside Errorsmith."

ORLANDO JULIUS & HIS AFRO SOUNDERS
ORLANDO'S AFRO IDEAS
"Great round-up of funky highlife/afrobeat from the Nigerian Saxophonist. Heavy bass, highlife drums, up-front percussion and fiery horns make for a mix every bit as essential as the Ebo Taylor LP. He even flips the Apala rhythm a popcorn flavour!"

KRAFTWERK
COMPUTER WORLD
"40 years on since the dawn of the 1980s and this still sounds as fresh as ever. This had such an influence on the young producers who were just getting their hands on newly affordable drum machines and synths. *Numbers* is the absolute peak of ripply electronic asteroid funk."

#36 Bob Dylan

THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN

CBS staff photographer Don Hunstein captured this much-imitated image of Bob Dylan and girlfriend Suze Rotolo in 1963 at the corner of Jones Street and West 4th Street in New York's West Village. The initial plan for Bob's second album had been to photograph Dylan and Rotolo inside his nearby apartment, but struggling to get *the* shot, Hunstein suggested heading out into the freezing snow-blanketed West Village. Rotolo, recently returned from Italy, was wrapped inside several sweaters and a coat. A nonchalant Dylan, evoking the essence of James Dean, seemed concerned only with his appearance, hands stuffed into his pockets. As literary critic Janet Maslin put it "a photograph that inspired countless young men to hunch their shoulders, look distant, and let the girl do the clinging". The light was fading fast, leaving Hunstein time to capture only a handful of shots in colour. "Well, I can't tell you why I did it," he later recalled, "but I said, 'Just walk up and down the street'. There wasn't very much thought to it. It was late afternoon – you can tell that the sun was low behind them. It must have been pretty uncomfortable, out there in the slush." Despite flirting with frostbite, Rotolo loved Hunstein's shot: "It's one of those cultural markers that influenced the look of album covers precisely because of its casual down-home spontaneity and sensibility." ●

MIRRORPIX/GETTY

SNAPSHOT

THE TROGGS

LONDON 1966

Never the most fashionable band, even at the height of their powers, The Troggs are pictured outside the Take Six boutique in Wardour Street, Soho. The reason why Ronnie Bond, Peter Staples, Chris Britton and Reg Presley look quite so delighted is they were promised £1,000 worth of clothes by shop owner Sid Brent if they released a single which made the UK Top Five. With the band's second single *Wild Thing* at No. 2 in the charts, the fancy threads were in the bag.

This was 1966 and Andover's finest managed to hit the Top Five on two further occasions that year with *I Can't Control Myself* ("Your slacks are low and your hips are showing") and *With A Girl Like You*. Another 45, *Any Way That You Want Me*, was a relative flop, only making it to No. 8.

Just like the England national football team, it was all downhill from then, and the band's mainstream popularity quickly fizzled out. The legacy remained, though, and in 1991 The Troggs recorded *Athens Andover*, an unlikely 11-song collaboration between themselves and three members of R.E.M. It was recorded in the American band's hometown of Athens, Georgia, and was released in March 1992.

The Troggs are also famed for *The Troggs Tapes*, an in-studio recording of Reg Presley's running commentary on a session, filled with in-fighting, regional accents and some highly creative swearing. ●

DAVID McCLISTER

WHY I LOVE

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND DOUBLE TROUBLE
TEXAS FLOOD

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

Joanne Shaw Taylor tells **Felix Rowe** how the late guitarist's debut album gave her the blues and why he's the reason she rarely plays a Fender Stratocaster

My introduction to Stevie came when my dad played me the *Live At The El Mocambo* DVD. I cycled straight over to the local Our Price. The blues section was just this tiny little rack at the back and *Texas Flood* was the only Stevie CD they had. It's a really important album for me because it took me from being a Solihull school girl to the ridiculous notion that I could be a blues artist. I went from the Spice Girls and NSYNC to Stevie Ray Vaughan overnight!

I still get very nostalgic about it. Growing up in Solihull in the 90s, it opened up a whole new world. I was already playing guitar, but in a very disciplined classical world. Stevie was the perfect gateway blues artist for my generation – this wild Texan cowboy with such a cool image. A skinny, muscly guy with massive hands, big chest tattoo and cowboy hat, looking cool in a kimono.

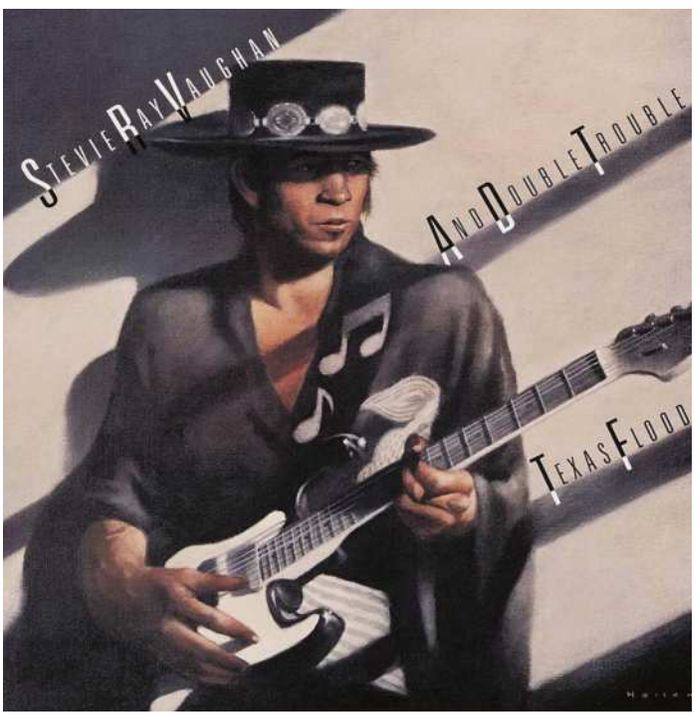
I became obsessed pretty quick. He died young at 35 and he'd only done four studio albums, I think, in his lifetime, but I just soaked up everything. He met David Bowie at Montreux Jazz Festival, which is how he got the *Let's Dance* gig. But Jackson Browne was also there and offered him three days' studio time. So the band flew out to LA and recorded 10 songs in two or three days, and that was pretty much what became *Texas Flood*. It's done very live with minimal overdubs, and that made an impression on me. It's all about feel and capturing a good performance.

Texas Flood has a lot of what I'd call pop songs. They're quite catchy, so it was an easy route into the blues. *Pride And Joy* was the first Stevie song I tried to learn on the guitar. He does this raking rhythm, very signature to him, where he's only playing one string, but he's hitting all of them while muted to get a really thick rhythm sound. *Pride And Joy* is a great example of that. The instrumental *Rude Mood* also showcases how catchy his guitar playing could be.

The bad thing about Stevie Ray Vaughan for me is that I sat in my bedroom for 12 hours a day trying to copy him. I'd literally spend hours trying to learn one lick. Now, whenever I play a Stratocaster I just do a bad Stevie Ray Vaughan impression, falling back into those bad habits I had when I was 14!

His playing was just flawless, incredibly smooth. Apart from his dalliances into jazz, he stuck to the minor pentatonic scale. He's a very traditional blues guitarist in that sense. He did a lot with not much to work with, but his phrasing was just fantastic. He never overplayed, but never ran out of ideas. It's that thing of: if it doesn't need to be said, why say it? But there's no part of the conversation that's missing and I think that's a lesson to us all.

The main thing with Stevie is tone. He tuned down to E flat and he played really thick strings, they were basically like telegraph wire, which gives a huge tone. Typically, players with heavier strings are jazz guitarists who don't bend the strings, but he was bending them up three, four notes higher than most. He was just a monster guitar player. ●



10 Questions For... BRENDAN BENSON

Felix Rowe catches up with the power-pop veteran and Raconteur about his new album, being a superhero and producing his idols

Your new album, *Dear Life*, sees you at your most experimental, particularly with the production. Did you set out that way?
"It happened out of necessity, really. I started in my studio in Nashville, and then after I'd recorded a few songs, I found out that the building was being demolished! So, I put everything into storage and put a little setup in the basement of my house. I couldn't set up drums anywhere, I couldn't be loud because my kids were home, so I'd make do with software instruments, where I could get under the headphones. And it was fun. I have a great space now, but I kinda liked it when I was having to make do with all these obstacles."

Starting writing before you knew you were making an album, did that free up the creative process a bit?
"I think for a while I got lost. I was producing other bands and writing with other people, and I sort of lost sight of my thing. So this record was just an exercise in freeing myself. It's been a while since I was really proud of a record like this. There were no rules, I wasn't even necessarily trying to write songs. *Good To Be Alive* was like an exercise in how to use software drums! The song was almost incidental."

Do you put a different hat on whether it's solo stuff or for The Ranconteurs?
"Not at all. When I'm in the throes of writing, I'm almost in a semi-conscious state. I'm not thinking about where it's going. A lot of times, they don't amount to anything, you know. Maybe I should've had more of a plan, but I prefer it that way. I kinda work myself up into a frenzy and then I don't eat, I forget about things like going to the bathroom! For me, that's the desired effect."

How did you and Jack White start working together?
"We were friends and fans of each other. In Detroit, I'd do a show and do some White Stripes songs and he would play shows and do my songs. We'd hang out and talk about music. One day, I was working on *Steady As She Goes*, Jack stopped by and we finished it. Then it was like, 'Great, we've gotta do some more!' We said we should write together for years, but The White Stripes were breaking out and he got really busy really fast, so there wasn't an opportunity until later."

What's next for The Raconteurs?
"With The Raconteurs, it's like a superhero. You know, 'Who was that masked man?', like a Zorro vibe where we just appear and come together to make a record every few years, and then disappear. I kinda like that. Right now, we're just not in our superhero outfits. I think if we tried to harness The Raconteurs too much it wouldn't work."

You produced Robyn Hitchcock's 2017 self-titled album. Were you already a fan?
"Oh yeah, massive fan of The Soft Boys and his solo work. I'd heard he'd moved to town, but I don't remember how we met. Every time I see Robyn is like meeting him for the first time. He's so colourful and animated and funny and clever. He's got a mind like no other."

Did you find it weird working with a personal idol?
"I had to check myself a lot, make sure I wasn't trying to get him to do old things that I liked. I got the credit, but I think I just pressed record."

What's your favourite work as a producer?
"I'm very proud of Leigh Nash, *The State I'm In*. We put so much thought and care into making that record and I think we nailed it. Producing records is a bit like being in the audience, you just try to keep that excitement going."

What are your thoughts on vinyl?
"I'm so glad that it seems to be here to stay because it's the best-sounding format there is, hands down. You know, it is absolutely the best fidelity when pressed and mastered correctly. I listened to the last Queens Of The Stone Age album the other day on vinyl and it just sounded so fucking good. There's something about a vinyl record that kind of lives as you listen to it."

Jack plays about a lot with the format – vinyl within vinyl, locked groove outros, alternate intros depending on where you put the needle... What do you make of all that?
"I think it's great man, he's making it fun. He's a little bit of a Willy Wonka, a crazy inventor always thinking about these ideas! That's what I love about Jack." ●

"FOR A WHILE, I GOT LOST. I WAS PRODUCING OTHER BANDS AND WRITING FOR OTHER PEOPLE AND I SORT OF LOST SIGHT OF MY THING"

ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR

For 30 years, he's been a six-string sonic architect in Radiohead, but it's taken Ed O'Brien until now to find his own voice. His debut solo album as EOB was certainly worth the wait. **Daniel Dylan Wray** visits *Earth*

Radiohead's Ed O'Brien is taken aback. "I never expected this, I really didn't," he says, telling *Long Live Vinyl* about his first venture into becoming a solo artist. It was a move that surprised even him, but the result is an album, *Earth*, that has untapped something within the musician. "I feel awakened as an artist now. I'm on a bit of a mission."

O'Brien's awakening came when he was living in Brazil for a short period of time. He'd taken over some gear with him, with the vague idea of making electronic music, but it wasn't connecting. "I wasn't getting anything back from it," he says. "After about six or seven weeks, I wasn't feeling it." His head and his heart were wrestling. "I thought making electronic music was where I should be," he says. "I felt that electronic music is the frontier of sound and that it's where the pioneers of sound are at the moment, but what my gut was telling me was to pick that acoustic guitar up in the corner."

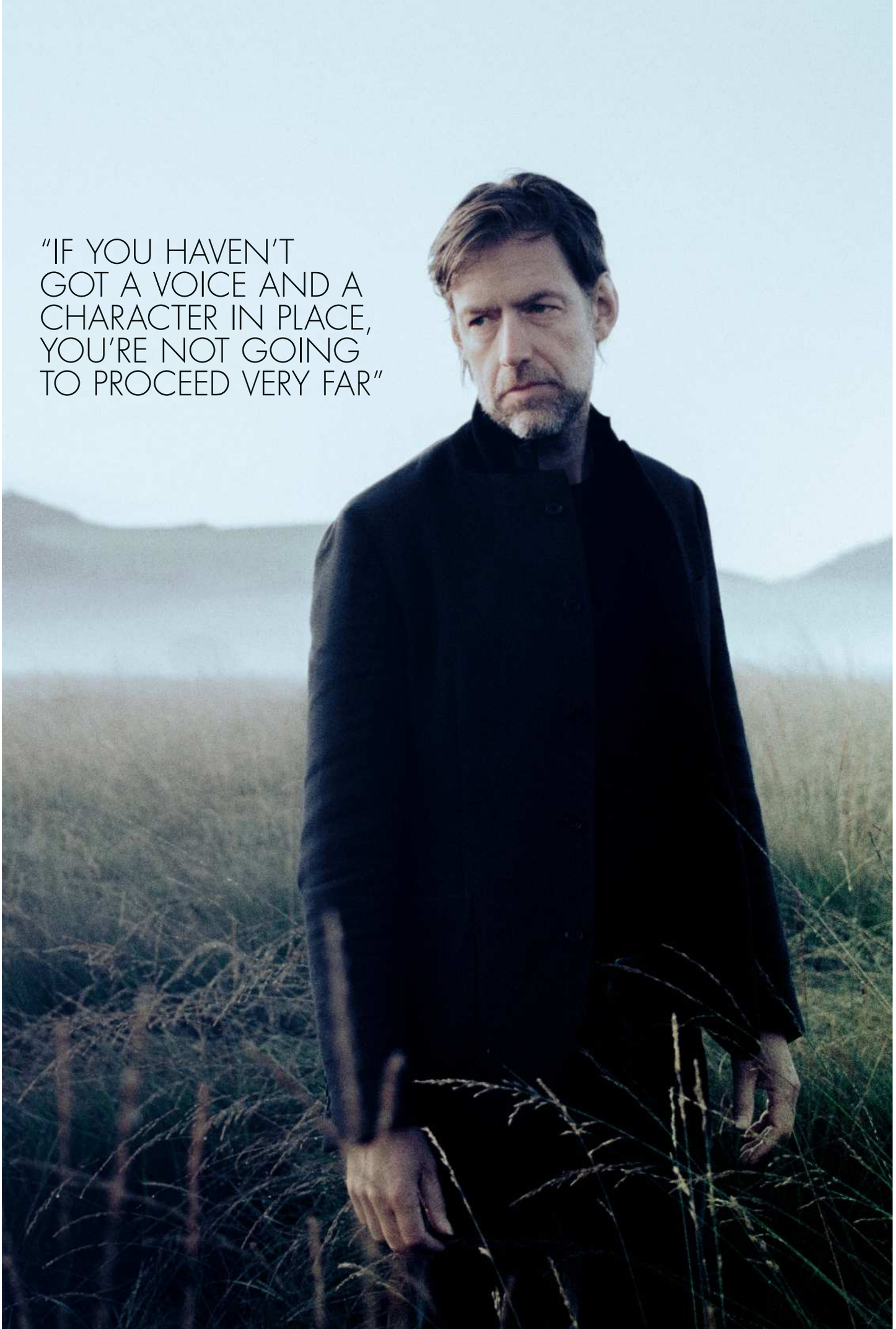
Then, he put a blast from the past on the stereo: Primal Scream's *Screamadelica*. Something clicked. "I thought, 'this is it'," he recalls. "I wanted my music to have that joy and light, the depth and breadth of that album, with elements of dance, soul and ambient, to be uplifting in parts." This moment of instantaneous reaction, combined with listening to his gut and knowing that a flat-out electronic album wasn't in him, began to drive forward what O'Brien was doing musically. It became a project based on intuition.

"It's been a letting go and surrendering process," he says. "I've really been led by my intuition on this, which has been quite revelatory because your mind can throw up quite a lot of barriers, whereas intuition can see around the corner and what you weren't expecting. It allows you to see the bigger picture, and so surrendering to that has been the most powerful aspect of making this record. I ended up doing things that I normally wouldn't. I'd think it wasn't possible, but instead I was like: just do it."

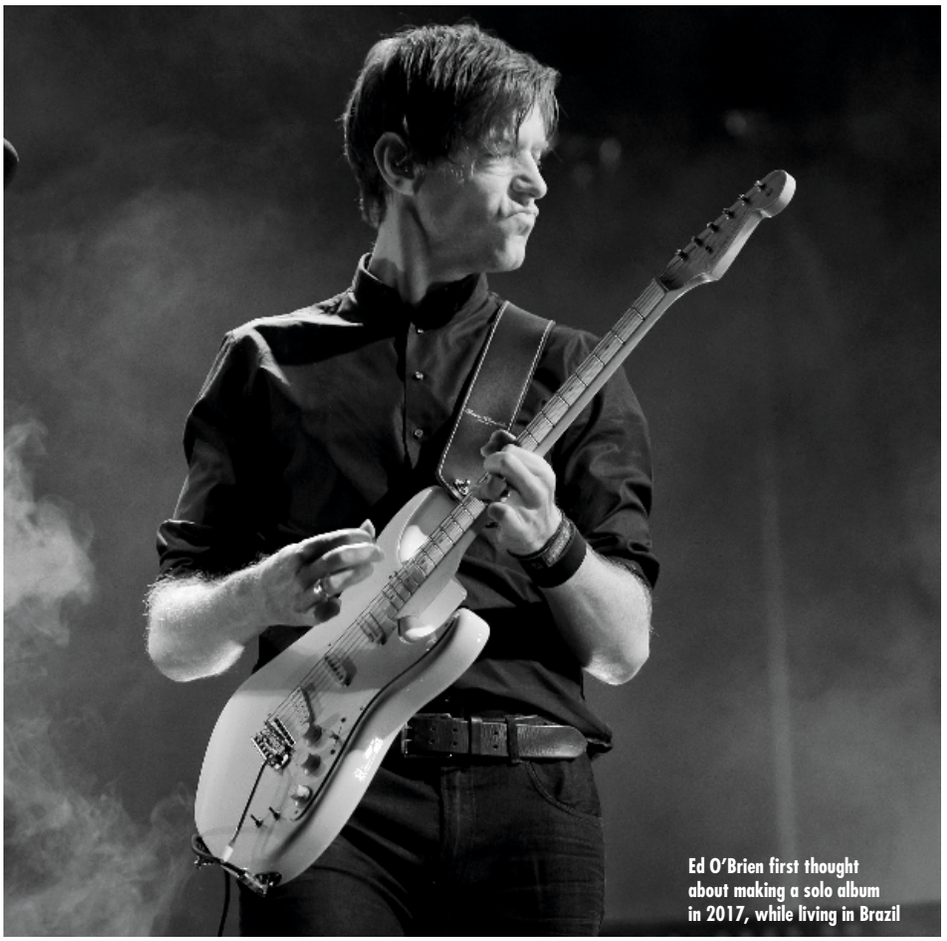
In the end, O'Brien says he was trying "to make an existential dance record". One inspired by the words of Walt Whitman and William Blake and their ability to focus on "this feeling of the big picture. The extraordinary show that is life on this planet." Musically, the album touches upon ambient dance, such as on the looping, Jon Hopkins-esque *Brasil*, but it possesses more breadth. Indie, art-pop and stripped-back acoustic moments also feature, all led by O'Brien's soaring voice, which feels familiar because of his key backing vocal contributions in Radiohead, but there's a sense of a new vocalist being born here. Finding his voice, literally, is something that came over time and required a growth in confidence. "If you haven't got a voice and a character in place, you're not going to proceed very far," he says. "Having not done any lead vocals before, my confidence grew over time. It grew from uncertain demos and then working with someone like [producer] Flood, he supported me so much that I knew I'd get there with the vocals."

A lack of confidence is not something one may expect to associate with a member of one of the most successful bands in the history of music, but it played a part in O'Brien's journey. "People have asked me why I would feel unconfident and I don't know. I guess lack of confidence is a sign of being uncomfortable, being in an area that is out of your comfort zone. But I think that that's the only place to be as an artist because it means you're on new

Radiohead's Ed O'Brien finally discovered his inner lead singer for his debut solo album, *Earth*



"IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A VOICE AND A CHARACTER IN PLACE, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO PROCEED VERY FAR"



Ed O'Brien first thought about making a solo album in 2017, while living in Brazil

ground. It's also very true to the spirit of Radiohead and where I come from that you don't go over old territory. If you feel that you've done something before or you're doing something for reasons other than artistry or creative pursuit, then it's not right. So for me this project is entirely consistent with what I've known about being in music for the last 30-odd years."

Also, a sense of uncertainty is so fundamental to this album and project, one borne almost from accident, that O'Brien embraced it. "It's about trusting in the process," he says. "Knowing that you don't have all the answers but you have a feeling of the process and you have an idea of what you want to do. That's enough to lead you on. You don't have to have everything and all the answers there from the start. My limited experience of songwriting tells me that when you're at that stage you hear the potential of how these songs can be. The hard part is realising that potential, that's the craft, in getting to that end point."

Despite this very much being a record plugged directly into the guts and heart of O'Brien, he had some help along the way, too. Catherine Marks, Alan Moulder and Adam 'Cecil' Bartlett joined Flood on production duties, whilst there are an impressive number of musicians who feature: bassist Nathan East, drummers Omar Hakim and Glenn Kotche, and The Invisible's multi-instrumentalist David Okumu. Plus Portishead's Adrian Utley appears on two tracks, with Laura Marling singing alongside O'Brien on the album closer *Cloak Of The Night*.

The album is fundamentally an exploration of the micro and the macro. At one end, it pulls out and looks at the planet, and on the other it zooms in and focuses on specific places, people and feelings. "On one hand, this record is me trying to deal with loneliness, which I think we've all suffered from," says O'Brien. "In this case, it focuses on a young woman living in a city in a very patriarchal society. So it moves from the micro of things like that to then the pulling back and the macro of looking at the earth from space."

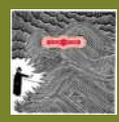
DOWN TO EARTH

Earth was put together over a period of several years, with O'Brien suggesting the most difficult part of making the record was when he was called back into Radiohead duty, and then trying to rekindle what had started years earlier. But also over that period the world has changed a great deal, and what O'Brien heard when he slapped on *Screamadelica* all those years ago was hope.

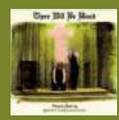
C FLANIGAN/GETTY

ALL I NEED...

FIVE OTHER ESSENTIAL RADIOHEAD SOLO ALBUMS ON VINYL



THOM YORKE
THE ERASER
XL RECORDINGS, 2016
Yorke's first solo album was a chance for him to throw himself more into his love of electronic music, channelling Boards of Canada, Aphex Twin and Autechre, along with some more post-rock leanings.



JONNY GREENWOOD
THERE WILL BE BLOOD
NONESUCH, 2019
Jonny Greenwood's primary solo output has been via his hugely influential film score projects, and this one for Paul Thomas Anderson's 2007 film is some of his best work. Sweeping and engulfing, much like the vast barren landscapes the film depicts, as well as being restrained, intricate and free from Hollywood bombast.

THOM YORKE
ANIMA
XL, 2019
An album that slipped out quietly after the more press-featured soundtrack album he did for *Suspiria*, this is some of Yorke's most interesting and arresting work. Minimal glitchy electronics, combined with his ever-distinct vocals, make for an album that manages to sound harsh and abrasive as well as tender and potent.

JONNY GREENWOOD
YOU WERE NEVER REALLY HERE
INVADA, 2018
The score for Lynne Ramsay's ultra-visceral film is one that matches it for tension and edge. It's a perpetually unravelling piece that broods and pulses in menacing tones, and is one of his most potent scores to date.

PHILLIP SELWAY
WEATHERHOUSE
BELLA UNION, 2014
Radiohead's drummer has released two albums, an EP and a soundtrack LP over the years. However, perhaps the finest of the bunch is this one. It's a gentle collection of art-rock that fuses ambient-like soundscapes and piano compositions with Selway's delicate vocals.

O'Brien's solo ambition has taken a firm grip, and he's already plotting the follow-up to *Earth*

Does he remain hopeful for the world now and is this a hopeful record? "Hopeful is a funny word," he offers. "I thought I was making a hopeful record, but I think I was just making a warm record – there's a lot of love in it, it's an open-hearted record. There are times when I'm hopeful and times when I'm not. The world is a very different place to what it was six years ago, but all the things going on now I was feeling six years ago – a lot of what is going on doesn't surprise me because it's cause and effect, and the cause was there six years ago. We get drawn into the fear and hysteria of our times and one thing I felt was important to do was to pull back up and look at the bigger picture. These are challenging times, but I wanted the music to look towards the light as well."

The warmth of this record is one O'Brien loosely connects to one of Radiohead's best albums, in a sense. "The record you make is going to be the product of what you've been making before, so the colour and the warmth of the record has connections," he says. "I don't think there's been a warm Radiohead album since *In Rainbows* [2007]. The others I wouldn't call warm, there's a coolness to them."

Was there a need for O'Brien to distance himself from the band on this record then? To make something distinct that could avoid comparisons to Radiohead records? "I had a great conversation with Johnny Marr about this," he answers. "He said: don't be scared of sounding like yourself. He initially avoided that, but has since embraced it. It's your head that says you should do this or that, but it's your heart that will guide you as to whether it's right or wrong. Of course, there's going to be an overlap with what I do with Radiohead. Although the album is distinct enough as it is, so I'm not trying to deliberately move away from Radiohead territory."

One thing this project does have in common with Radiohead, however, is that O'Brien views it as the beginning of a trilogy. "I like the idea of trilogies and things in threes," he says. "I always viewed the Radiohead albums as being in trilogies: *Pablo Honey*, *The Bends* and *OK Computer* were all part of one chapter."

Does being in one of the most critically acclaimed bands of all time lead to a sense of pressure releasing a debut solo album? "When you put music out, there's going to be some people that like it and some that don't, and you just have to hope that there will be enough that do," O'Brien says. "I haven't read reviews for about the last 20 years, but I need good feedback for this, critical constructive feedback is good. I'd be lying if I said I didn't want people to like it, I do."

This artistic awakening that O'Brien has had makes him feel rejuvenated, alive and buzzing with excitement for what the future holds. Before the first album is out, he's already pressing on with thoughts about the next.

"I'm already thinking about the second record," he says. "That's the process of creativity, you close one thing and become happy with it and then very quickly start to think about how you can make something better. I'm ambitious musically and I want to do something different. In 10 years' time, I hope I have four or five really strong albums under my belt and will have really established a musical journey. It feels like I'm at the start of something."

"THESE ARE CHALLENGING TIMES, BUT I WANTED THE MUSIC TO LOOK TOWARDS THE LIGHT AS WELL"

GARY WOLSTENHOLME/REDFERNS/GETTY

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FRESH GHOST

Fed up of feeling "over-qualified and underpaid", Ghostpoet left music after his last album to run a coffee shop in Margate. Life as a barista didn't go to plan either, and he returned to music to pour his frustrations into his fifth album. As he tells **John Earls**: "I'm a glass-half-full guy…"

There's the possibility if you were on the Kent coast in the last couple of years, your morning latte might have been served to you by one of the most forward-thinking musicians Britain produced in the 2010s. Annoyed at the under-performance of his 2017 album *Dark Days And Canapes*, Ghostpoet sought refuge by opening his own coffee shop and bar, Radio Margate, moving to the artistic hub after spending nearly all of his life in South London.

Ghostpoet mucked in, serving coffees by day and drinks at night. "I had to deal with blocked toilets, floods and fights," he notes. "Getting up stupid-early to serve coffee was nuts." But it was better for his soul than simply trying to make another album after years of being a commercial nearly man, failing to make a mainstream breakthrough despite two Mercury Prize nominations.

"I was sick of music after the last record," Ghostpoet admits. "*Dark Days And Canapes* just didn't work out. I didn't get to gig as much as I'd have liked, the campaign didn't last as long as I'd have liked. I felt I was at a point where I was over-qualified and underpaid. Getting out of the city and moving to Margate, trying new things, was to reinvigorate myself."

Naturally, some of Radio Margate's customers recognised their new barista, much to Ghostpoet's amusement. "Some dudes would come over like, 'Wait, are you…?' and others would give me this half-squinting look I've come to know," he smiles. "I'd realise at that moment, 'I've got to walk away and get busy somewhere else', as I know they'd be Googling me on their phone and clocking me. It was hilarious, but I'd never thought about being a public figure before. I'm just somebody who makes music, being recognised has never been my thing. Some people I know were, 'What, you work *in a coffee shop*?'. I wanted to open the shop to have more immediacy between graft and reward: getting just desserts for a hard day's work. I wanted that after seven years in music, where you put in a lot of work with no guarantee of anything."

MISUNDERSTOOD

Sat in the café of boutique Hackney hotel Mama Shelter, Ghostpoet is sanguine about his status in music. It's now 10 years since the release of his debut EP, *The Sound Of Strangers*. He's fought against being pigeonholed as a hip-hop artist since day one, his music encompassing jazz, dub, rock and anything Ghostpoet pleases in between. The new album, *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep*, continues this spirit of adventure, as Ghostpoet talks enthusiastically of using a Brazilian percussionist on all 10 songs, as well as the toy synths made by Critter And Guitari which help form the BBC Radiophonic Workshop-style unsettling whooshes underpinning *Black Dog Got Silver Eyes*.

It's a brilliant state-of-the-nation record, perfect for hunkering down with in self-isolation. But the musician, who recently moved back to South London, isn't sure it'll be his breakout album. "I'm at the point where people are sick of fighting to push me into a box," he laughs. "People now go, 'Ghostpoet? He's… over there'," flapping an arm into the middle distance. "People's attitude is, 'He does stuff that sometimes I think is alright, but it's definitely… over there. We'll let him do that'."

He's aware that his determination hasn't made it easy for the mainstream to keep up, explaining: "I've always felt misunderstood as an artist. But part of that is it's only the last couple of records that have been concentrated in a recognisable direction. Evolving as an artist can confuse people. If you listen to this record and my first one, there *is* a thread, but it's very different worlds."

That Ghostpoet is calm over his status is partially down to his experience running gig nights at Radio Margate. He learned how to run the mixing desk and help roadie for visiting artists, most of whom were less successful than Ghostpoet. "The music I like is

"I WANTED TO OPEN THE COFFEE SHOP TO HAVE MORE IMMEDIACY BETWEEN GRAFT AND REWARD"

EMMA DUDLYKE

SUCH A SHAME

Ghostpoet's new album, *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep,* continues his tradition of working with distinctive vocal talents. Massive Attack's Daddy G, Kano and Maximo Park singer Paul Smith have previously featured on Ghostpoet's music, and 2015's *Shedding Skin* saw Nadine Shah on two songs, while its single *Immigrant Boogie* was a duet with future Shame singer Charlie Steen.

"I just use voices I really like," is Ghostpoet's rationale. "I've always liked voices that are different from the norm and have their own character. It happens from time to time that they go on to have success, like Nadine and Charlie, though I don't know if I helped their careers any. Charlie's voice on *Immigrant Boogie* was mixed so weirdly, you can't tell it's him!"

None of the four additional voices on *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep* – Katie Dove Dixon, SaraSara, Art School Girlfriend and Skinny Girl Diet singer Delilah Holliday – are known in the mainstream. Dixon is the keyboardist in Ghostpoet's live band, Holliday sang on his previous album, *Dark Days And Canapes*, while SaraSara and Art School Girlfriend are local Margate musicians. They all sound ideal for each song – could Ghostpoet have a career in A&R? "No way! I find these singers over time and I like doing that, but A&R is a weird job. I'd like to do other work in the industry, but not that one."

mainly experimental and avant-garde jazz," he says. "I saw artists who will never reach a certain level commercially, yet they still have so much desire. That was really inspiring and made me readdress where I am, to realise life could be so much worse. I've been very lucky in my career so far."

It's that enthusiasm which seems more typical of Ghostpoet than the stories of toxic relationships and beatdowns writ large on his new album. He admits it wasn't until he began finalising the 10 songs for the album from 25 contenders that he realised how lyrically dark it is, which helped inform choosing the swinging *Breaking Cover* as the opening song. Its chorus is a neat summation of where Britain is at, as he muses: "Things are kind-of complex these days/ hard hats at the ready," but Ghostpoet reasons: "That song starts, 'I'm alive', and I wanted those to be the first words heard on this record, before you get into all these songs about death!"

The album took four months, with Ghostpoet commuting from Margate to a studio in Hackney, working from 10am-7pm and listening to the day's mixes on the train home. "I wanted this record to be a reflection of the times we're living in," he says. "So it's inevitable it turned out how it has. But, when I make a record, I was taking in the news subconsciously, putting down lyrics on instinct that made sense. I'm a glass-half-full person and, although it's quite a dark record, away from music, I'm relatively jovial."

LLV can confirm this: Ghostpoet bustles in for our interview full of apologies despite only being five minutes late and says sorry again immediately when he shakes hands with *Long Live Vinyl* and his publicist. "I've got to stop doing that!" he laughs, getting out a bottle of Carex. In black leather jacket and jeans, with neat stubble and smart chunky glasses, he looks like a successful tech entrepreneur as much as an accomplished leftfield innovator. Over a sparkling water, Obaro Ejimiwe laughs a lot in 75 minutes discussing the joy and frustration of life as Ghostpoet.

GOING IT ALONE

Although Ghostpoet produced his 2011 Mercury-nominated debut *Peanut Butter Blues And Melancholy Jam* himself, his next three records were co-productions with Richard Formby, John Calvert and Leo Abrahams. *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep* is wholly self-produced again. "I didn't really know what I was doing on *Peanut Butter…* I just did it," he admits.

"This one was more about garnering the experience I've gained, going in completely alone and making sure all the decisions were down to me. It's made me realise I can do anything. It's like a veil has been removed from my eyes, where I know now that being a producer isn't that complicated. Learning the logistics was the most brain-taxing side. I needed a spreadsheet, so I could know, 'Have I recorded that yet? What happened on that take?'. The record would have been an absolute shambles without it…."

Such a practical approach is typical of Ghostpoet's approach to his career. He was 27 before releasing *The Sound Of Strangers*. Having worked in a call centre, he carried on working in the customer service department of University College London until nine months after the release of *Peanut Butter And Melancholy Jam*. He's been a grafter since helping his parents as a kid in Tooting, South London, first in their independent estate agency, then running a taxi firm.

"I was brought up that, if you've got bills to pay, you've got to do what you've got to do," he shrugs. "I've taken that into music. I've got to do as much as I can to make sure I'm heard, and to create the music I want to make with a level of quality to it. I was the only musician in the house, but it's weird how what you learn from your upbringing can be made to work for you in different circumstances."

Ghostpoet's father died just as Obaro was beginning to make music, but his mother has slowly got used to her son's job. "She didn't understand it," he admits. "Unless you were a superstar, mum was 'What do you mean, you're a musician?'. It took her a while to get her head around it. I think my first TV appearances helped, and so did my gigs, realising people were coming to see my show was much more tangible than me saying, 'I'm a musician, mum'." He shared his mother's doubts, hence the delay to go full-time as a musician. "I had to trust I'd be alright financially," he reasons.

"There's no guarantees in this game but, to do well, you've got to give it a go. It was a mental struggle to let go of the security of working at UCL – you know you can make it work, you just don't know how. I've been used to it for a while and now, if anything, it's about trusting myself more and knowing my own self-worth."

Given Ghostpoet's determination to do what's necessary to pay the bills, has he ever tried to make it easier for himself by seeking to

"I WAS BROUGHT UP THAT, IF YOU'VE GOT BILLS TO PAY, YOU'VE GOT TO DO WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO DO"

There are times when Ghostpoet grows tired and dares to fall asleep

EMMA DUDLYKE

STILL WATERS

Ghostpoet has "around 200" LPs, but admits space in his new South London flat prevents him buying too many more for now. He has a "pretty nice" Pro-Ject turntable he found on a day off touring in Amsterdam, having bought his first player 11 years ago. "My flatmate has a better system," he says. "Playing the test pressing of my new album on his turntable was a big moment. I thought, 'Yeah, this record actually sounds pretty good!'"

With limited space, Ghostpoet admits he hasn't even dared visit his new local record shop in case he gets addicted, with Rough Trade East and Honest Jon's his favourite stores. He also gives a shoutout to Margate shops Transmission, Elsewhere and Cliffs.

Ghostpoet's most-cherished record is Muddy Waters' *Live At The Checkerboard Lounge, Chicago 1981*, which features all The Rolling Stones bar Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman. "I found that in Amsterdam the same day as my turntable," he recalls. "It's one of the rare times I've seen a record and thought, '*I have* to have that'."

He admits he doesn't store his collection as well as he'd like, saying: "I'm pretty good at keeping records stowed safely away on tour. At home? There are some I take special care of, like Radiohead and Dr John. But most of them are just in piles, because I don't have the space to keep them shelved properly as I'd like. One day!"

write a hit single? There's another big, easy laugh as he admits: "A couple of times, and it didn't work! In moments when there was no money in the account and it felt like the last chance saloon, yeah, I tried to make something a little catchier. But all it taught me was that I can't force myself into it. You've either got that talent or it happens by chance, and I'll never do it again."

Instead, there's the rich, rewarding world of *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep* to explore. Ghostpoet will make perfectionists like Spiritualized and The La's sick as he casually reveals many of the songs are first vocal or instrumental takes, while the running order took only "about half-an-hour" to decide.

The album's centrepiece is the extraordinary *This Trainwreck Of A Life*, the rumbling assault that opens Side Two, wherein a couple care more about their hatred for each other than societal collapse. Inspired by Serge Gainsbourg, it starts with fellow Margate singer SaraSara reciting a poem Ghostpoet wrote, which SaraSara translated into French. "There's not enough songs about hating somebody," he reasons. "It's about loving and hating someone equally, the weird power struggle you need to survive, where two people are caught up in needing that hatred for each other to feel alive. It felt the right time to write about that." Is it drawn from Ghostpoet's own relationships? "Not that song, no. But I know of relationships that are like that, and I find them so interesting."

It follows the first side's slow-build climax *Rats In A Sack*, the album's most openly political song, in which Ghostpoet wonders whether to "jump first and maybe later fret" in despair at the rise of the far right. "When I sequence an album, I think about what song needs to end Side A," he explains. "What song will make you get up and turn the record over, so that you go, 'Oh shit, that's a moment to end Side A on!'. And then Side B has to open with a 'Wow, that's interesting!' song."

Although Ghostpoet admits his music has been hard to keep up with at times, one consistent thread has been his visual, widescreen lyricism. It's there throughout *I Grow Tired But Dare Not Fall Asleep*, not least the title track, which starts with him sighing, "Count me out, I'm heading to Ecuador" – though he admits that, while Ecuador scanned better lyrically, his real dream escape destination is the Galapagos Islands: "I've always wanted to go there one day. It's the fantasy of just ripping everything up and packing a suitcase."

The visual side comes out in Ghostpoet's other big passion, photography. He loves street photography, which comes out in his own pictures – he wants to make a book combining words and photos, though he's not sure exactly how yet. Nor has he had time to curate the theme for a photo exhibition he'd love to display. Hopefully, that'll be some way off, as it'd mean the campaign for Ghostpoet's sixth album has kept him too busy. Having realised he can be a deft producer, he wants to produce other artists, too. There's nothing Ghostpoet can't do – on the way out, he even remembers to bump elbows, rather than shake hands. ●

Sometimes I wake up with an empty beer can on my belly and a whole album's written, and I think, 'Holy shit! How did that happen?'

In 2012, Brian Christinzio moved to Manchester. The trio of albums he's made since as BC Camplight have vindicated that decision. He tells **Jonathan Wright** about songwriting, mental illness and beginning anew when you've nothing left to lose…

The idea of the visionary artist whose mental illness is somehow intrinsic to their creativity, even glamorous, is pernicious. Just ask Brian Christinzio, better known as singer-songwriter BC Camplight, a man who by his own estimation has "to deal with some pretty significant mental health problems" on an ongoing basis. We shouldn't glorify "the crazy guy, the Brian Wilson, the Syd Barrett," he thinks, but be more realistic about the day-to-day struggles that sometimes come with conditions such as depression and anxiety.

"I've tried to strip away [such myths] by being really open about my mental illness and try to get others to open up as well," he says. In terms of Christinzio's creative life, the latest evidence of this process arrives with the new BC Camplight LP, *Shortly After Takeoff*, which he described as "an examination of madness and loss" when its release was first announced.

"During the recording of the record, I was in a particularly strange place," he says. "I guess you could say I still am there. I unexpectedly lost my dad just as I was beginning the writing of the record. I don't know if it's even 100% hit me to this day, but it was a big dose of surreality, which if you know my brain, that's something I don't need. I guess a lot of the record was trying to come to grips with even what reality is."

This wasn't, he adds, somehow a "cathartic" process, and not a process we should see in terms of a comeback narrative where the writer as hero successfully battles inner demons.

"This is very much an inward look of somebody that's been going through some serious shit, and at the end of it they're still going through some serious shit," he says. "Not necessarily a happy ending, but that's the way life is."

If all this makes Christinzio sound like glum company, that's misleading. Having fetched up in Manchester from Philadelphia in 2012, he's fully on board with self-deprecating English humour. His observations about his struggles are peppered with laughter. He has to wear sunglasses on stage, he says at one point, because of issues with his vision where lights at night "have a horrific halo over them" and moving his head brings the kind of visual trails you get on an acid trip. But, he jokes, he might wear the shades even if he didn't suffer such visual interference. "I mean I am a pretentious prick anyway, don't get me wrong…"

If that's true, he's a pretentious prick capable of creating the most glorious records, as *Shortly After Takeoff* – the third instalment in a series of albums Christinzio has dubbed his Manchester trilogy – eloquently demonstrates. Fusing baroque pop flourishes with West Coast harmonies, it's a record that's detailed and rich, infused with different colours and textures, as if made by a latter-day Harry Nilsson. By his own estimation, Christinzio has "a very short attention span", so that many of his compositions are "closer to two or three songs than they are one song", and it shows.

BC Camplight's new LP, *Shortly After Takeoff*, is the concluding part of his Manchester trilogy

What's changed from previous records, though, is that Christinzio now has a "willingness to speak directly to the listener". Gone are the stream-of-consciousness "Van Dyke Parks lyricisms" he used to write. "I'm really starting to enjoy taking lyrics more seriously as a craft, as seriously as I take arranging strings and arranging songs, and I think that's a direction that I'm starting to realise is limitless," Christinzio says. "There are no rules to lyrics, which I thought there were. I say shit on this record I didn't think I'd ever be able to sing about. There's one song that starts off with me doing a [fabricated] stand-up comedy routine [*Ghosthunting*]."

FEAR AND FLIGHT

In short, Christinzio is in a good place creatively. Which, if he'll forgive the comeback narrative, is in itself remarkable. To understand why, we need to go back to 2012, when Christinzio first moved to the UK. For all he had released two albums as BC Camplight via One Little Indian, *Hide, Run Away* (2005) and *Blink Of A Nihilist* (2007), as well as guesting on Sharon Van Etten's *Epic* LP and playing live with The War On Drugs, this wasn't a case of an established artist relocating. He chose Manchester as a destination because, when he had played in the UK, "I always had a great time there and the six people that were in the audience really enjoyed it." This was a last throw of the dice by a man saying "fuck it", whose life and "small career" had hit the rocks.

"Everyone's opened up their arms to me in the city and I don't really know how to put it in words [how I feel] because I was coming from Philadelphia, where I had literally just given up," he says. "I was squatting in an abandoned church, I had basically given up on music and burnt a lot of bridges, lost almost all my friends and…" He pauses before continuing, "I was going to blame it on the mental illness, which doesn't help, but I was just an asshole really, I was just miserable."

On his first day in Manchester, he went to a pub called The Castle Hotel. There, waiting to get keys to a flat from a landlord, he met people who "are still my best friends today". Having never thought of himself as part of a musical scene before – "I never really artistically cared what anybody else was doing" – Christinzio made connections in a city that embraced his music. Gradually, he began to forge a career that had been in danger of never really beginning at all.

But it's rarely been smooth sailing since. In 2015, BC Camplight released *How To Die In The North* via Bella Union, the first LP in the Manchester trilogy. It was "piecemealed" together, says Christinzio, and was "a reflection

of throwing your old life away and throwing yourself into something new."

It garnered plenty of attention and things seemed to be going well, only for Christinzio to be barred from the UK after overstaying his visa. The problem, it seems, was that he had a blood clot in his leg and was advised not to travel. He now travels on an Italian passport, which in a pre-Brexit world resolved the visa problem.

Around this time, he put together a tour of the USA, "anything to stay busy and relevant". His regular band were unable to get work permits, so he hired new musicians, but they weren't ready for the demands of the shows. A "toe-cringing" nadir came in his former hometown. "In my stupid mind I thought that, 'Hey, I was here and popular in Philadelphia eight years ago, of course all these people are going to show up', and we weren't very good as a band and there weren't a lot of people there, and it was a bit embarrassing," he remembers.

Yet despite such setbacks, Christinzio was steadily gathering an audience. The pointedly named *Deportation Blues* (2018) received support from 6 Music, especially the Brian-Wilson-meets-Jeff-Lynne-doing-synth-pop of *I'm In A Weird Place Now,* and raised Christinzio's profile further.

"One thing I like about how my career has progressed is it's never felt like, to me at least, that I could ever be mistaken for a flash in the pan because I never really flash, I'm always just stuck at the side of the pan," he deadpans. "So I feel like I have this nice thing going, where I have licence to do whatever I want and the profile's getting bigger and bigger, not at an explosive rate, but I can't really argue with what's happening."

THE CUSP OF SUCCESS

The net result of all of this is that the next few months, perhaps even longer, look set to be busy as BC Camplight the band – drummer Adam Dawson; Francesca Pidgeon on backing vocals, sax and clarinet; guitarist Thom Bellini; bassist Stephen Mutch; and Luke Barton on synths and acoustic guitar – tour the new record. "Not only are they my best friends, I swear they're one of the best bands in the world," says their leader, appreciatively.

And there's real hope this may be a breakthrough album. As anyone who has listened to longtime supporter Marc Riley's evening shows on 6 Music will testify, those who encounter BC Camplight live seem disproportionately to become the kind of evangelists who message radio stations to tell a wider audience about the experience.

"I'm really happy with the preliminary way people are responding to the album because, like I said, this is the first time I really feel like I opened up a little bit, or a lot on an album, and to see people really digging that makes me feel good because I don't make a lot of connections in my real life," says Christinzio. "I barely look people in the eye, it's nice to be able to have an emotional attachment with these friends I'll likely never meet."

It's a reminder again that Christinzio in so many ways doesn't find the business of being a public figure easy. To return to those mental health problems, he suffers from depression, "crippling health anxiety" and "horrific OCD" to the point where he has to do "a certain amount of rituals before I leave the house" and, when he's out, sometimes "can't go around that block because then you'll be turning in the wrong direction".

He knows how strange this sounds: "It's absolute ridiculousness, but when I don't do those things my anxiety gets to a point where I start having this thing they refer to as de-personalisation, where basically everything feels like a dream, like I'm inside a glass ball and I'm separate from my thoughts."

As we discuss mental illness further and, full disclosure, I mention my own battles with depression and the bottle, which perhaps prompts some of the remarks here, the one thing that becomes crystal clear is that Christinzio has slowly learnt to accommodate his conditions.

He can't write, he says, when he's "at the apex of depression", but then neither can he write when he's "completely content". Between lies an "awesome little grey area where I still feel like shit but I'm inspired". It was in this space, as he processed his father's death, that he wrote *Shortly After Takeoff.*

Looking further ahead than the new record, Christinzio floats the idea of recording his next LP in a different city. Rather ironically, for all he has "a fiancé and a dog and a house and all these friends" in Manchester, he suspects it may be time to "give myself a new challenge elsewhere", in part to avoid the dangers of a "groundhog day vibe". Then again, things aren't that well planned in Christinzio's life, so this may not be how things pan out.

"Sometimes I wake up with an empty beer can on my belly and a whole album's written, and I think, 'Holy shit! How did that happen?'" says Christinzio of the way he works. "I just have to wait for it and hope that it's good." So far, so very good indeed. ●

> **I say shit on this record that I didn't ever think I'd be able to sing about**

COLLECTING BC CAMPLIGHT

For vinyl enthusiasts who want to hunt down BC Camplight releases, one issue is that his first two LPs – *Hide, Run Away* (2005) and *Blink Of A Nihilist* (2007, both One Little Indian) – date from the noughties, or the time of CDs, when albums by new artists often weren't released on vinyl. However, early singles *Couldn't You Tell* (2006), *Blood And Peanut Butter* (2006) and *Suffer For Two* (2007) are all available on 7" and you can pick each up for less than £10.

Turning to the Bella Union years, a Mint condition copy of *How To Die In The North* will set you back circa £20, while a silver vinyl copy of *Deportation Blues* similarly retails at £20 or so. *Shortly After Takeoff* will be released on clear vinyl. In short, prices are currently very reasonable. That may change.

As for Christinzio's own listening habits, he likes classical music and podcasts: "Get ready for another pretentious thing here. I very, very, very rarely listen to music. I don't have any vinyl. I don't have a CD player. I don't have Spotify. I don't have anything to listen to music on. I find it distracting in all the wrong ways listening to music. It's something to do with the way my brain processes things, but when I listen to music all I can hear is music theory [which he studied as a child] – why is this going in to that and 'x's and 'o's and formulas – I can't really relax to music without over-deciphering it."

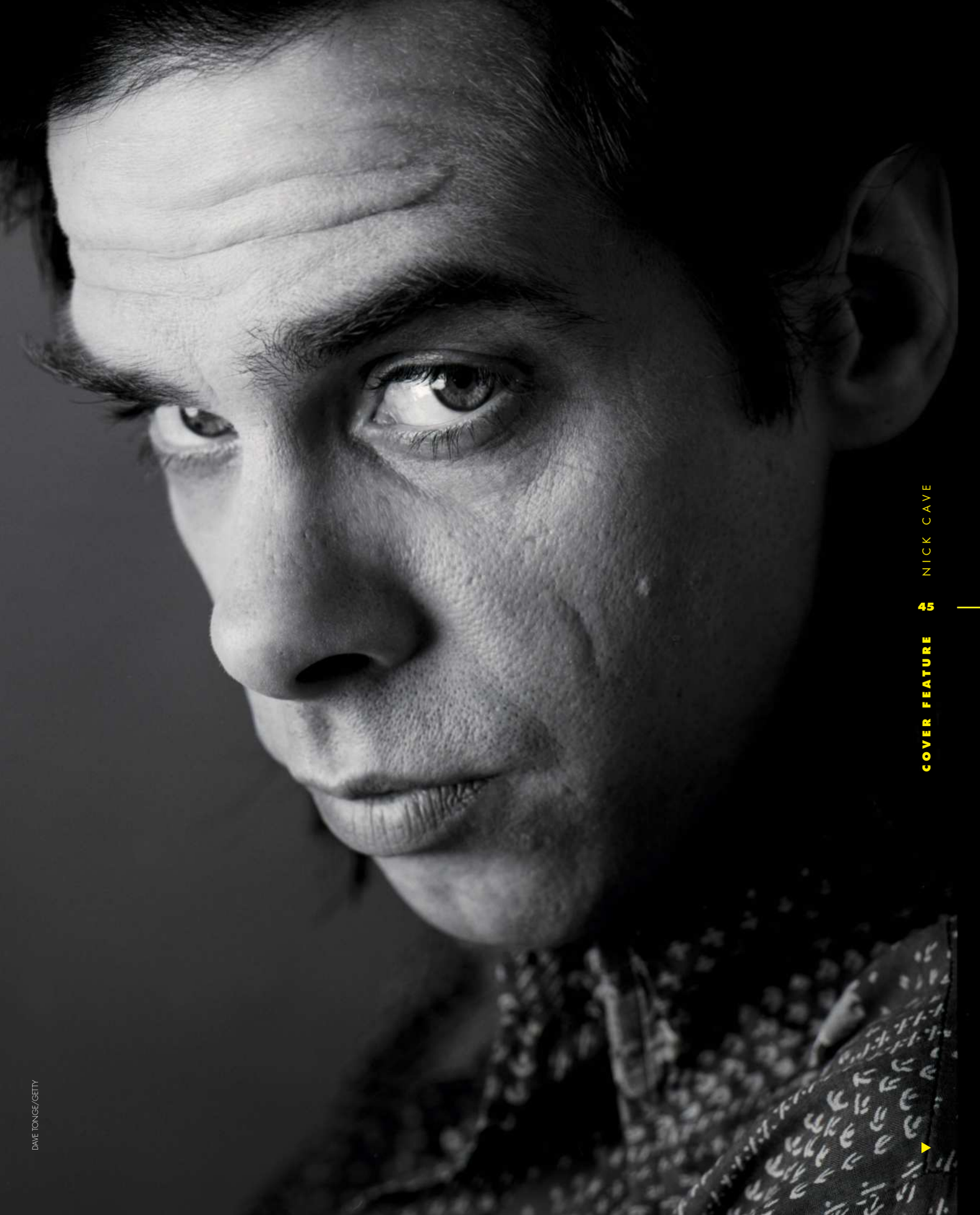
Where Do We Go Now But Nowhere?

40 years after arriving in the UK, Nick Cave stands alone. An unimpeachable artist who refuses to repeat himself, presiding over an imperial back catalogue. From The Birthday Party to The Bad Seeds, and numerous collaborators, Daniel Dylan Wray speaks to those who helped the prince of darkness build his kingdom

When Nick Cave arrived in England from Australia in 1980, he did so with a colossal thump, landing head first into a pool of bitterness and squalor. His band, The Birthday Party, a feral and ferocious post-punk outfit, used to read the *NME* cover-to-cover back home in Melbourne (even if it was six weeks late by the time it arrived via boat). They learned about a groundswell of exciting new bands in the UK and decided it was the place to be, but arrived to find the bands largely mediocre, a hostile reception, and were soon living in squats that would result in their guitarist Rowland S Howard suffering from malnutrition. "We went from being big fish in a small pond to frog spawn in an ocean," Howard said later.

Problems were further exacerbated for Cave and Howard by a little issue they had carried with them from back home: heroin. "They arrived with drug problems," says their old band member Mick Harvey. "So they had to service those problems and both of them were completely unemployable. They were out on a limb."

However, the band managed to take their anger, resentment and disappointment and spew it back at the people of London when on



DAVE TONGE/GETTY

The Birthday Party adopted a confrontational approach to their distinct blend of bluesy rockabilly

stage. While they arrived to indifference, their live shows soon began to enthral and terrify audiences. "It was on the edge all the time, there was a real nervous energy at the shows," says Harvey. "There was the potential for anything to happen. Sometimes it felt like it was on the edge of some kind of violent explosion. When it all came together, the stars aligned and all the chemicals were at the right balance, the shows were unbelievable."

Prior to becoming The Birthday Party, the group – made up of Cave, Howard, Harvey, Tracy Pew and Phill Calvert – had been in the more new wave outfit, The Boys Next Door. As The Birthday Party, they made two albums, *Prayers On Fire* and *Junkyard*, and by 1983 they were already close to implosion point as they released their finest material on a couple of EPs as a parting goodbye: *The Bad Seed* and *Mutiny*. Drugs, inner-band tensions, a breakdown in the songwriting relationship between Cave and Howard, and their audiences all were contributing factors.

The band seemed to contain so much manic, wired, fraught and frantic energy within them that collapse was always a case of when not if. Also, those shows that had bordered on a violent energy had changed as audiences soon began to come to gigs to cause trouble and antagonise. "The whole situation needed an original response from the audience," Harvey says. "Crowds and groups of people by their very nature tend to start behaving like a mob, especially once there was an expectation of how wild or exciting the show was going to be. An element of surprise worked best, when people would just come along and then be presented with this pretty wild show, not expecting it to be that confrontational. By '83, we were playing slower and slower songs to offset that expectation. We didn't want people going nuts the second we started playing."

One night, an audience member even took it upon himself to clamber on stage and begin urinating on Tracy Pew as he was playing. Pew returned the favour by smashing his bass into his head. Cave was becoming exasperated. "I don't know of another group who are playing music that is attempting in some way to be innovative that draws a more moronic audience than The Birthday Party," he said in 1983. "This is not everybody of course, just people I see from stage, there's always 10 rows of the most cretinous sector of the community."

FEROCIOUS SNARL

Dynamics had also started to change. Cave didn't want to sing songs written by Howard anymore, or even work with him on them. "Nick not wanting to write with Rowland anymore was a bit of a death knell for the band," Harvey says. Harvey had also started working with Cave more as a songwriter and Einstürzende Neubauten's

"There was always the potential for anything to happen. Sometimes it felt like it was on the edge of some kind of violent explosion"

Blixa Bargeld was the co-founder of Einstürzende Neubauten, and longtime member of The Bad Seeds

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS/GETTY GIE KNAEPS/GETTY

The Birthday Party regularly provoked a frenzied reaction from their audience

FRANS SCHELLEKENS/REDFERNS/GETTY

Blixa Bargeld was also brought in to play some guitar on the final Birthday Party recordings. "There was a lot of ill feeling about Blixa being brought in," recalls Harvey of Howard's response. "It was a jealousy thing I guess. I think he felt rejected by it."

It was Harvey that then called time on the band, by which point they had also inspired a sea of imitators who blindly missed the point and instead copied their haircuts and vaguely goth sound in mimicry the band disdained. A brief tour as Nick Cave & The Cavemen followed, but as Cave began to write more songs and assemble an album, he needed a new band, and so Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds were born, comprising initially of Cave, Harvey, Bargeld and JG Thirlwell, although Thirlwell soon departed and Magazine's Barry Adamson and Hugo Race entered.

Howard and Pew were out and a new era was born, as the ferocious snarl and clattering fury of The Birthday Party gave way to a more song-focused outfit. It was also clear Cave had fallen for Bargeld and his unusual approach to playing. He recalled seeing Bargeld on TV for the first time: "He was the most beautiful man in the world. He stood there in a black leotard and black rubber pants. Around his neck hung a thoroughly fucked guitar. His skin cleared to his bones, his skull was an utter disaster, scabbed and hacked."

Harvey recalls the transition as being "fairly loose", but the sessions for the album were often intense, long and mania inducing. "Nick was just experimenting and trying to get different sorts of ideas together and approach making the music in a different way," he says. "After losing interest in The Birthday Party, I think he was trying to find out what music he really was interested in making. I think the first album was just purely experimental, taking that linear music and using narratives and dynamics to tell stories." Hugo Race remembers: "There was this idea in the air that nothing could be valid if it sounded like anything that had previously been done."

For Barry Adamson, the shift in approach from his old group was distinctly noticeable. "Magazine was very controlled and felt like it had an order to it," he says. "Whereas this wasn't at all. It felt like being let off the leash." Producer Flood recalls the song *Cabin Fever* being an apt description for the whole process. "It was like nothing I'd ever dealt with before," he says. "The whole thing was eye-opening in so many different aspects."

The band would be in various up and down stages of drug highs and lows, coming in and out at different times, which left Flood there pretty much constantly to record whatever might be going on. "Flood was stuck in there for huge chunks of time not getting much sleep," Harvey says. "He was on the edge of paranoia, they were full-on, those sessions. At the end, we walked out of there completely insane, out of our heads, and that was it."

FIVE NICK CAVE & WARREN ELLIS SOUNDTRACKS

WEST OF MEMPHIS
J-2 MUSIC, 2014
A synth-laced score full of dense and eerie soundscapes to soundtrack the unbelievable case of the West Memphis Three. Not only is this some of Cave and Ellis' finest film score work, but it was key in discovering the tonal foundations for what would become *Push The Sky Away*.

THE PROPOSITION
MUTE, 2005
One of the the pair's earliest scores captures perfectly the vast landscapes of the bloody outback depicted on screen. Ellis' violin wails and sings above Cave's piano lines, to create a dense, moody, yet stirring score.

WIND RIVER
LAKESHORE, 2017
Following on from *West Of Memphis*, and in line with some of the more recent Bad Seeds material, this score is full of rich, enveloping soundscapes. However, the icier sounds also merge with some gorgeous violin work from Ellis and tender piano parts from Cave.

MARS
MILAN, 2017
A score for the National Geographic TV show about Mars is one of the more experimental offerings from the duo. Veering into almost electronic territory at times, it bubbles and pulses with an energy that indeed feels otherworldly.

THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD
MUTE/BMG, 2007
A score that in many ways acts as an interesting bookend to where the duo are now as a creative force. A very acoustic soundtrack, even featuring Cave on vocals at times, that favours a slow-burning, creeping tone.

Through his lyrics Cave has explored his obsessions with death, love, Elvis and religion

Warren Ellis has proved to be the perfect foil for Cave's creativity

The band toured the album – one that was often slower, more brooding, atmospheric and less brutal than The Birthday Party – and every night they opened with *A Box For Black Paul*. The nine-minute piano-led number that slowly creeps along like a night crawler was a direct message to the audience: this is no Birthday Party. "The tour drew crowds expecting the confrontation of The Birthday Party," recalls Hugo Race. "Starting with *Black Paul* was a kind of provocation. This very long, quiet song resulted in people yelling and throwing stuff."

It's this transitional moment that in many ways became the lifelong mantra for The Bad Seeds; to do things on their own terms, even indulge in wilful obstination along the way, and to carve out a career that was unwaveringly theirs. Their 1984 debut *From Her To Eternity* set a template for how the band would approach both the creative process and their audience in future, but sonically it laid out foundations that would be built upon, expanded and mutated hugely.

The following year came *The Firstborn Is Dead*, a record that plunged deeper into Cave's blues sensibilities and growing Elvis obsession via biblical imagery. Shortly after, eager to shake off the dark gothic overlords image people seemed keen to give them, they released *Kicking Against The Pricks*, an album of covers that touched more upon country, blues and pop rather than The Birthday Party derivative goth scene that was blowing up at the time.

A few members came and went as the 1980s progressed; Adamson left along with Hugo Race, but by the 1990s the band had landed on a line-up that would fundamentally be the key Bad Seeds core for years to come: Cave, Harvey, Bargeld, Conway Savage, Thomas Wydler, Jim Sclavunos, and a few years later Warren Ellis would solidify that group.

"Things were a lot less chaotic. There was a feeling of a new awakening. Something was starting to happen"

VIOLENT & OBSCENE

Drugs had played an up and down role during these years too, with Cave's heroin addiction occasionally taking hold and resulting in some of the band's darker and more desperate songs, found on albums such as the brilliant *Your Funeral... My Trial*. Cave entered rehab and moved to Brazil before releasing 1990's *The Good Son*, an album more full of light, love and piano. Once again, it depicted something of a new awakening for the band as they embarked on what would be one of their most successful decades.

Drummer Sclavunos had been a key figure in the no wave scene, playing with Teenage Jesus & The Jerks before going on to appear briefly with The Cramps and Sonic Youth. When his time to join The Bad Seeds came, it was a welcome move. "I had quit all my other bands and was down on my luck," he recalls. "I was back in New York with my tail between my legs thinking this music malarkey was not working out for me. It wasn't the first time I had considered giving up. I was trying to

JOHN STODDART/POPPERFOTO/GETTY SIMON WOODCOCK/PHOTOSHOT/GETTY

conceal my absolute glee, as well as my nervousness, and then I spoke with Nick." He was brought in as a touring member for the band's 1994 album *Let Love In* before joining as a full-time member for 1996's *Murder Ballads*. Like Adamson, who entered the band all those years earlier, Sclavunos, too, found it to be like nothing he'd ever experienced. "I'd never been to a session that casual or spontaneous before," he says. "It was a bit of sea change in terms of studio practice and the creative process."

In fact, it was Sclavunos who provided the impetus for one of the band's most beloved and eternal songs: the blistering *Stagger Lee*. "*Stagger Lee* was very much an afterthought," he says. "The album was done and we were in the overdub stage back in London, and Kylie Minogue had come in to do vocals on *Where The Wild Roses Grow* – everything was being wrapped up. I had found this book that contained the body of lyrics that Nick utilised for *Stagger Lee*. It was a book of prison poetry. There were a couple of versions of it in the book and there was one that was particularly violent and obscene that appealed to me, and I brought it to the session and said to Nick, 'you might enjoy this, even though it's a bit late'. He really liked it. Then within minutes we went into the room where the equipment was still set up and just bashed it out in two takes."

LOVE ME TENDER

Tales of anger, blood, violence, murder and the general seedy underbelly of life have peppered, if not entirely seasoned, much of the Bad Seeds' career, but as the 1990s moved into the 2000s, yet another rebirth seemed to occur in the band and a different direction took hold. Cave's 1997 piano ballad album, *The Boatman's Call*, written in the wake of his break-up from PJ Harvey, led to a resting period of several years, in which he finally kicked heroin once and for all, and they returned to a run of albums that would embrace more earnest, love-filled, tender and often pop-leaning songs.

Their weakest effort was 2003's *Nocturama*, which led to lifelong member Bargeld leaving, but the man who replaced him, James Johnston, says that the band he entered was one brimming with possibility. "Things were a lot less chaotic," he says, referring to his brief stint as a touring member in 1994. "There was a feeling of a new awakening. Something new was starting to happen." The result was the double album *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus*, with the record ostensibly split down the middle between thundering gospel-infused rock and a more stripped-back and tender affair. "Nick was really leading the whole thing and there felt like such a sense of purpose to it," he recalls. "There was a buoyancy, a freedom. It felt like the band had something to prove."

Kylie and Cave first worked together on the *Murder Ballads* LP

BOB KING/REDFERNS/GETTY

FIVE NICK CAVE COLLABORATIONS

PJ HARVEY
HENRY LEE
MURDER BALLADS
A duet from the *Murder Ballads* album, that's a coming together with an artist who would soon become Cave's partner. The chemistry between the two in the video is as palpable and intense as the vocal delivery in the song itself.

KYLIE MINOGUE
WHERE THE WILD ROSES GROW
MURDER BALLADS
A pairing that couldn't seem more out of place if it tried, a heroin-addicted rockstar and the queen of commercial pop. Yet it worked and led to one of the most successful periods of The Bad Seeds' career as a result.

SHANE MACGOWAN
WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD
Cave and the Pogues man joined forces for this cover once made famous by Louis Armstrong. It's a wonderfully woozy, somewhat shambolic take that captures the rough edges of both singers as much as their golden croons.

CURRENT 93
ALL THE PRETTY LITTLE HORSES
Cave was a guest on the electronic industrial outfit's 1996 album *All The Pretty Little Horses*. He provided vocals for two songs, perhaps most prominently on the title track, which actually turns out to be a pretty, almost country folk-esque number for the band.

LYDIA LUNCH
HONEYMOON IN RED
Cave and Mick Harvey were unhappy with the outcome of the original version of Lydia Lunch's *Honeymoon In Red* album, so much so they asked to have their names taken off. However, while uncredited, Cave and Harvey's musical contributions to the no wave artist's album remain.

Cave's split from PJ Harvey inspired a number of songs on *The Boatman's Call*

However, another and even more surprising sidestep was about to come next for the band, as Cave took aside Ellis, Sclavunos and Casey to form Grinderman, a sardonic, scornful and explosive garage-rock band. "I think Grinderman was to shake it all up a bit and get away from stylistic ideas that Nick might be bored of," recalls Johnston, who was in The Bad Seeds at the time. "So they indulged in something a bit fresher and madder. You could even feel that need to do something different in rehearsals, too. With Nick, there's almost an impatience with him to shake it up and freshen everything."

This caused even more of a change, however. Mick Harvey, who had been Cave's right-hand man since the late 1970s in The Boys Next Door, decided to leave. Ed Kuepper, who replaced him on tour, says it was no real surprise. "Grinderman, I think, was the indication of a split in the band," he says. "Otherwise, why do it? Because it very specifically didn't involve Mick."

However, while such a move – alongside years of built-up tension and fatigue – may have resulted in the loss of a crucial member, Grinderman changed the dynamic. Not only had Cave and Ellis' creative partnership begun to take more of an accelerated form, it opened something up in the band. "Grinderman was a crucible for which we could pound a lot of random things together into a heated vessel and see what happens," says Sclavunos.

"It was something that was safely removed from The Bad Seeds' legacy." The side-project lasted two albums and was retired in 2010, but

DAVE TONGE/GETTY

The past decade has seen The Bad Seeds become frequent festival headliners

it's not been entirely ruled out that it may return. "You never know when it's going to rear its ugly head," says Sclavunos. "It's never been officially buried, so a hairy claw might reach from beyond the grave yet. There's a lot to be done with The Bad Seeds and it has to feel right, especially for Nick, as he is always the guy for which everything flows out from. He's the connection, the embodiment, so he has to be convinced in his soul that it's the right thing to do."

Around this time, Cave and Ellis also began to work regularly on film soundtracks and, once again, this extra curricular activity fed back into the lifespan, creativity and vivacity of The Bad Seeds – like an IV drip pumping a constant fresh ideas supply to the band. "There was a freeing up of things," says Ellis. "And this fed back into the band. Each project keeps informing each other. It's helped set up a foundation for how Nick and I work that carries on to this day. The way we go in to make music for a film is the way we go in to make music as a band. There's openness and an embracing of ideas that goes across everything we do, album or score. This has enabled us to have a relationship for the period of time that we have."

Nick Cave continues to mature as an artist – the journey isn't over yet

Perhaps what came next in The Bad Seeds' ongoing trajectory – one that has outlasted and outshone just about every trend, style, musical movement and fashion – is the most unpredictable chapter: they blew up. The adored cult band had been steadily playing theatres and big rooms for years, but after the release of their 2013 album *Push The Sky Away* and 2016's *Skeleton Tree*, they found themselves playing arenas to tens of thousands. "I always felt like the band could have a broader appeal than it was allowing itself to," says Sclavunos. "Nobody inhibited our career or anything, but it baffled me why more people didn't like that band. Granted, it's not a commercial band, and the last album is as difficult as any we've made, but I think it's a statement about how open audiences can be. I think people underestimate the public appetite for music that might not be so obvious."

And so, in 2020, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds have gone from a group struggling to shrug off the reputation of their previous band to one about to embark on their biggest tour to date, and with a huge career-spanning Nick Cave exhibition about to open in Copenhagen. Which, of course, leaves the question of what's next? For Sclavunos, the answer is the same as it's always been. "I have no idea what is going to happen," he says. "I have no idea where we'll go next and that conjures up a degree of excitement, a degree of anxiety, a great deal of curiosity." ●

MARK HORTON/WIREIMAGE/GETTY KEVIN WINTER/GETTY

THE ESSENTIAL

Nick Cave

Few artists in the modern era have covered as much ground as Nick Cave. Dig **Daniel Dylan Wray**, dig!

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds are an unusual band in that they don't have one essential classic album that defines them. Or even a classic period. There is no one must-buy album of theirs that jumps out above all overs. Instead, what they have created is an eclectic yet coherent body of work that is almost unfathomably consistent in its greatness, innovation and sense of evolution. 2003's *Nocturama* is perhaps the only album that could be deemed a dud (absent here for that reason), but The Bad Seeds have managed to stay on track for over 35 years now. In fact, the band are more popular than ever, playing the biggest venues of their career – and on the back of two albums of slow, sombre, often strange, experimental music. Their trajectory is a rare and refreshing one, in which a lack of compromise and a determined sense of vision has paid off in terms of tangible success. Their discography reflects this, too.

Across a 40-year period – if you include Cave's earlier bands, The Birthday Party and the Boys Next Door, who feature here too, you see a sense of growth and change but also a tone, personality and presence that remains distinct. The Bad Seeds have been a band that have weathered the storms of many trends, fashions and fads – from grunge to Britpop to rave – yet their refusal to change who they fundamentally are has resulted in their longevity and consistency across the decades. There's no iffy album to be found in this list, with the must-have sound or recording technique of the time stamped all over it; despite perpetually changing, growing and mutating, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds have always sounded very much like Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds. Imitated by many, but never the imitators. Where possible, our Top 40 albums, EPs and singles quotes Discogs Median prices for UK pressings and is in our order of merit.

40
DOOR, DOOR
MUSHROOM 1979

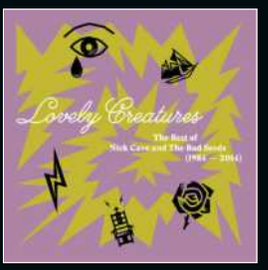
One from Cave's Pre-Birthday Party band, The Boys Next Door. With slightly more polished and new wave tendencies, this captures Cave and co. in their real infancy. There's the odd moment of rugged charm, but really the entire album is captured by *Shivers*, a ballad written by a 16-year-old Rowland S Howard that still resonates movingly today.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £43

39
THE WEEPING SONG
MUTE 1990

A nursery rhyme-like song between father and son (Blixa Bargeld and Nick Cave). It possesses a woozy, wonky rhythm, with a strange seasickness to its refrain, but blooms into something with a surprisingly catchy chorus. It's a playful song that celebrates the power of tears.

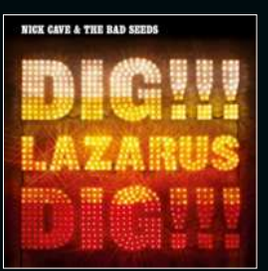
DISCOGS MEDIAN £17



38
LOVELY CREATURES
MUTE/BMG 2017

A best-of compilation may seem like a lame pick, but they often serve a purpose and this collection was nicely put together as a triple-gatefold release a few years back. 21 tracks, curated by Nick Cave and Mick Harvey, spanning the career of the band, makes for a pretty solid and well-rounded introduction.

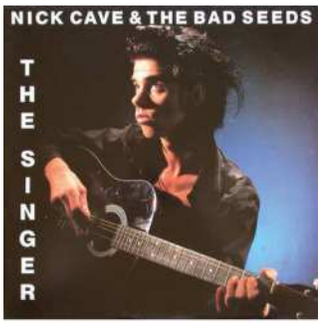
DISCOGS MEDIAN £24



37
DIG, LAZARUS, DIG!!!
MUTE 2008

Fresh off the back of Cave's garage-rock side project Grinderman, this album carried with it some of that primal rock 'n' roll edge, with Cave even having a rare stint playing guitar. It's actually the slower and moodier material (*Jesus Of The Moon*, *More News From Nowhere*) that shines brightest on this album.

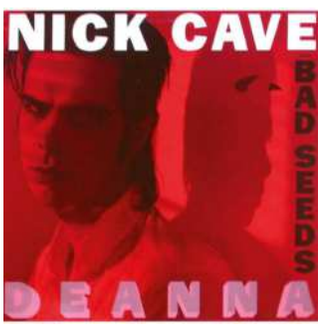
DISCOGS MEDIAN £19



36
THE SINGER
MUTE 1986

Also known as 'The Folksinger', this Johnny Cash number featured on the band's third album, one comprised of covers, *Kicking Against The Pricks*. The cowboy ballad lets Cave's voice hang low and slow as spaghetti western licks drop around him. Years later, Cash would return the favour and cover Cave's *The Mercy Seat*.

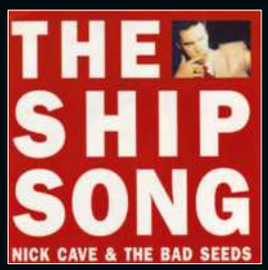
DISCOGS MEDIAN £8



35
DEANNA
MUTE 1988

Quite close to a pop song for Bad Seeds territory. The melody and vocal harmonies intertwine as Cave repeats the refrain about an old love, before veering into territory that preoccupied a lot of his lyrics back then: murder. There's an infectious, almost danceable skip to the song, that adds a buoyancy and bounce. A beautiful wrestle between the dark and the light, you could say.

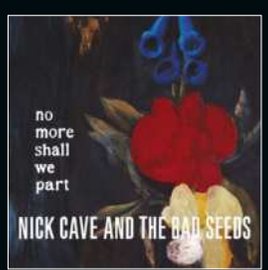
DISCOGS MEDIAN £17



34
THE SHIP SONG
MUTE 1990

One of Cave's most beloved and frequently played piano ballads. It retains a balance between tender and introspective, while also being quietly euphoric and with a big bursting sing-along chorus. In essence a love song, but also one that captures the downside of love via all-night arguments and their physical toll. Arguably a major turning point in the output of The Bad Seeds that would see many more piano ballads appear in the following years.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £13



33
NO MORE SHALL WE PART
MUTE 2001

After something of a hiatus with Cave getting off heroin, the band reconvened for another piano-led album after *The Boatman's Call*. Perhaps the album's greatest achievement may well be the video that came from the single *Fifteen Feet Of Pure White Snow*, which features The Bad Seeds dancing alongside Pulp's Jarvis Cocker and, err, Jason Donovan.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £21

32
HEE HAW
MISSING LINK/VIRGIN (AUS) 1989

A release that captures early Birthday Party material and even some stretching back to the Boys Next Door days. Perhaps the most notable inclusion is *The Friend Catcher*, which captures a pivotal moment in Cave and co's musical trajectory as they begin to embrace the dark, chaotic and angsty. Cave howls and wails over guitars that weave quiet menace and screeching assault. It's arguably the song that became the template for The Birthday Party. **DISCOGS MEDIAN £35**

31
GRINDERMAN 2
MUTE 2010

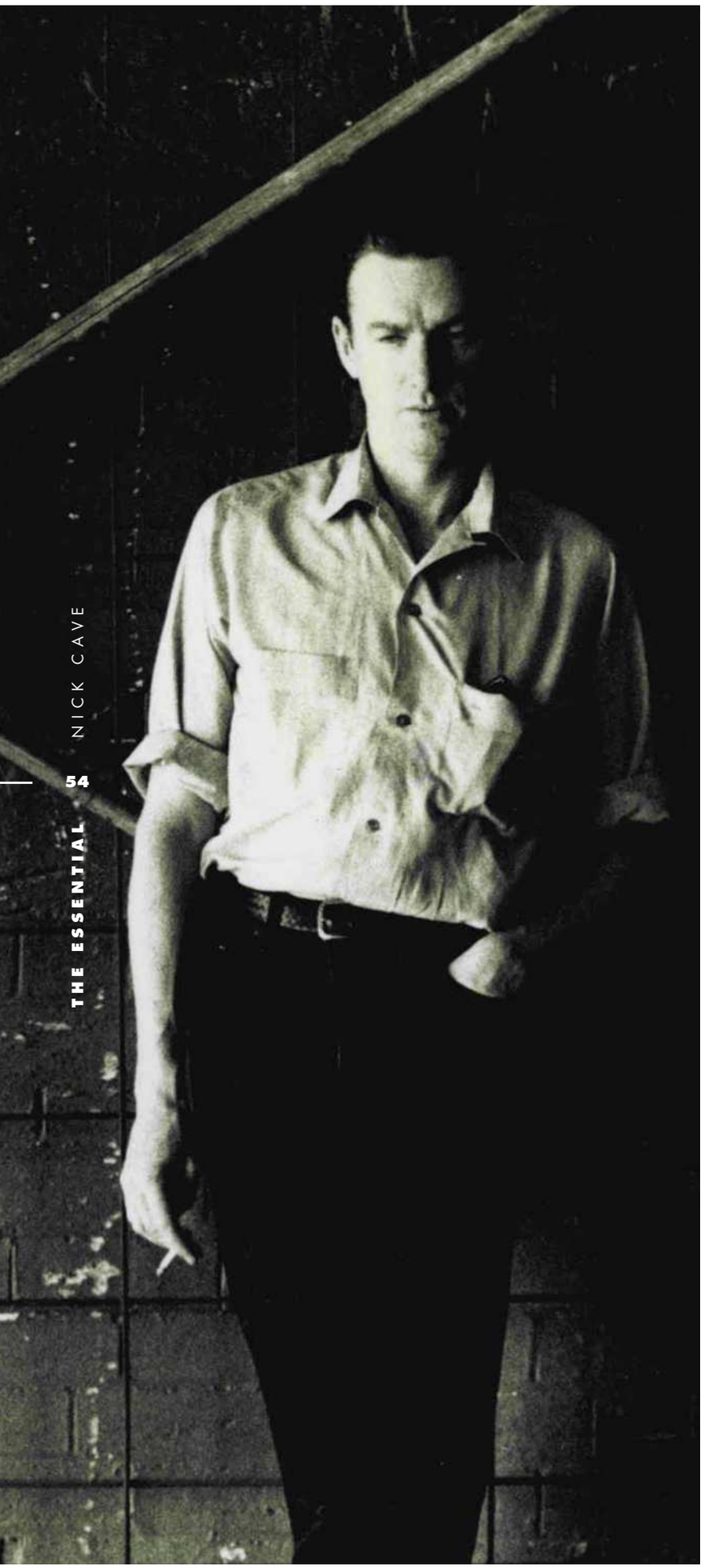
The follow-up to the garage-rock side band of The Bad Seeds was less of a raw and primal affair. A more polished, honed and crafted album, it intermingles psych, rock, garage and blues. Warren Ellis himself described it as: "like stoner rock meets Sly Stone via Amon Düül."

DISCOGS MEDIAN £18

30
THE GOOD SON
MUTE 1990

The album that came after Cave had relocated to Brazil. As a result, the dark, dank sounds of the previous Bad Seeds albums gave way to something lighter with sunshine and a new-found love in Cave's life. It's also a notable turning point as the moment softer piano ballads enter into the band's repertoire.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £35



29
RED RIGHT HAND
MUTE 1994

Perhaps the most famous Bad Seeds song due to its inclusion on numerous soundtracks, from Wes Craven's *Scream* to the Wire-pastiche approach of using various covers for *Peaky Blinders*. Its wonky rhythm and manic blasts of demented organ that explode and tear away from the unshakable groove ensure it remains an unavoidable highlight in the band's catalogue.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £51

28
RELEASE THE BATS
4AD 1981

The song that spawned a thousand rip-offs, most of whom missed the point. It was this screeching, howling, hilarious number that wrongly positioned The Birthday Party as a goth outfit. However, the feral intensity and wild abandon were never matched, and despite being a comedic play on their goth image, the song remains a firecracker.

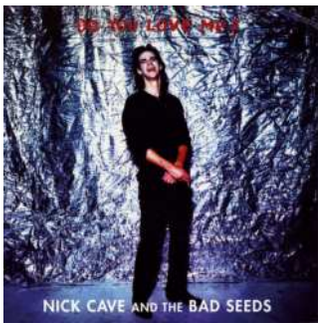
DISCOGS MEDIAN £8

27
THE FIRSTBORN IS DEAD
MUTE 1985

Cave at his most biblical and Elvis obsessed – the album's name is even a reference to Elvis' stillborn identical twin Jesse. A dark and brooding record that touches heavily upon blues and gothic rock, moving further away from the savage and feral post-punk sound that as The Birthday Party they had come to define.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £19

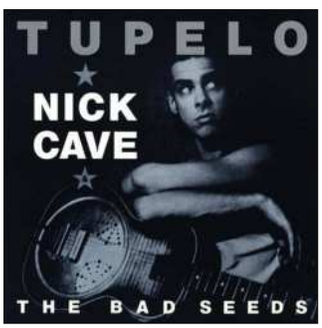
SAHLAN HAYES/FAIRFAX MEDIA VIA GETTY



26
DO YOU LOVE ME?
MUTE 1994

A track with two different takes that bookend the album *Let Love In*. It shares a similar sonic palette to the more ubiquitous *Red Right Hand*, yet this track stays closer to the groove, favouring quiet eruptions and a simple hook above cacophonous explosions. The interplay between the tumbling piano lines and Blixa Bargeld's ever-subtle guitar playing adds a deeply textural and atmospheric edge to the track.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £20



25
TUPELO
MUTE 1985

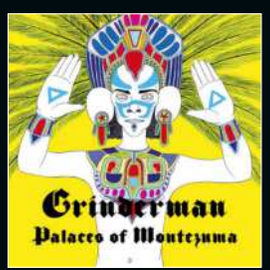
Opening with Barry Adamson's deep-thronged basslines, this song imagines the birth of Elvis during a storm in Tupelo, Mississippi. Peppering the track with biblical imagery, The Bad Seeds manage to make music that sounds as heavy and unrelenting as the rainfall captured on tape. A song that remains a staple in the band's live repertoire.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £11

24
YOUR FUNERAL… MY TRIAL
MUTE 1986

An album steeped in darkness in many ways. Cave's heroin addiction had really taken hold and the tone of the music reflects this. However, it's also home to some of the band's most potent songs (*Stranger Than Kindness*, *The Carny*, *Hard On For Love*) and so a great deal of beauty and marvel was plucked from an otherwise low point in Cave's life.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £28

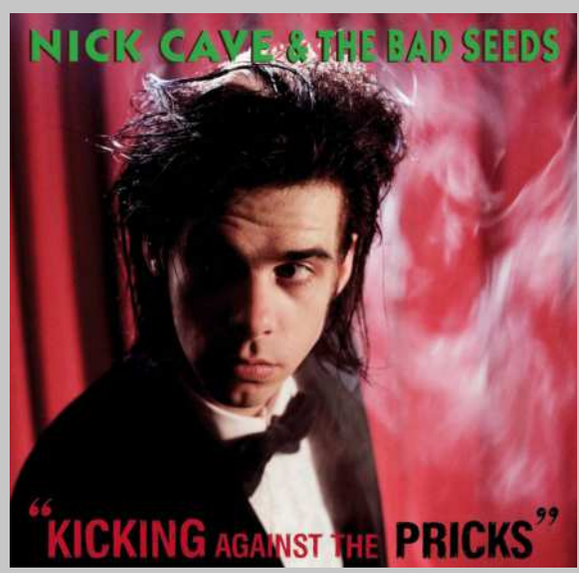


23
PALACES OF MONTEZUMA
MUTE 2011

Grinderman mellowed somewhat with age, but what they lost in raw jagged edge from the first album they gained in honed craft on their second. This could be a Bad Seeds song in many ways, something heard around the *Abattoir Blues/Lyre of Orpheus* era, with its gently skipping groove. However, removed from the pressures of that band there is a looseness and freeness to this song. It's a number that sounds as fun as it does beautiful.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £22

Cave is undoubtedly one of the finest songwriters of the post-punk era

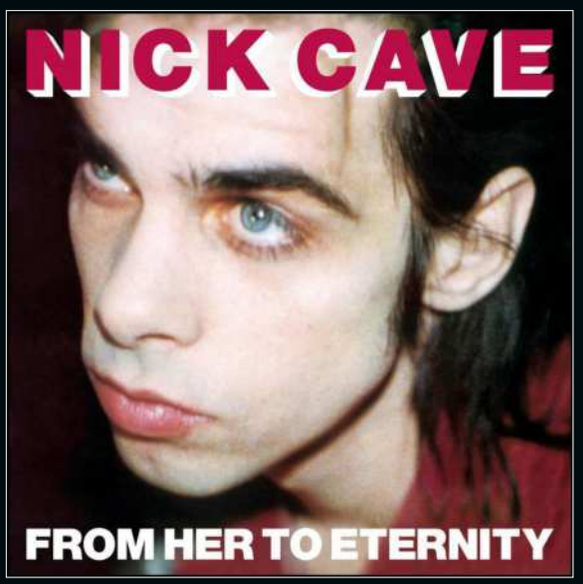


22
KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS
MUTE 1986

A covers album that seemed to go intentionally out of its way to shake off the band's reputation as kings of the goth scene. It was an unusual choice for a third album, but it paid off. The arrangements reflect a broader palette, touching upon blues and country as the band take on tracks by everyone from The Velvet Underground to The Sensational Alex Harvey Band.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £15

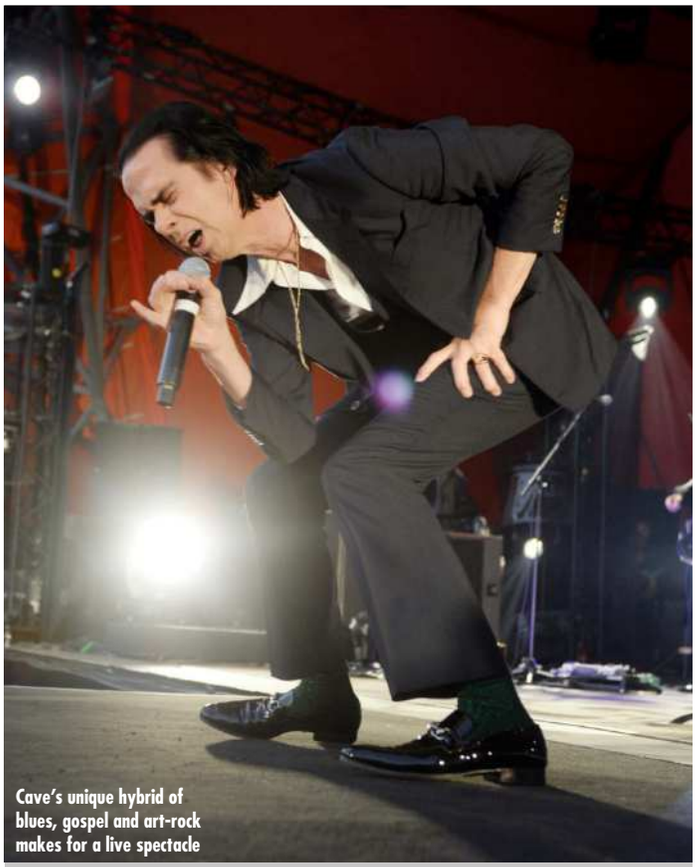
GIE KNAEPS/GETTY



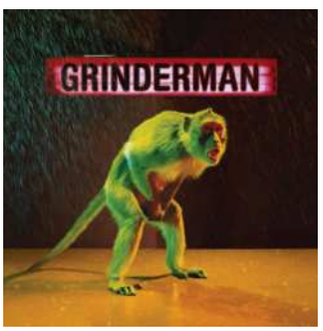
21
FROM HER TO ETERNITY
MUTE 1984

The debut album from The Bad Seeds captures a real turning point for Cave. The wild abandon and visceral snarl of The Birthday Party is still present, but it's more contained and focused. The title track of the album remains a staple in the band's set today and is one of their greatest songs, one that seems to grow, unfold and unravel even further over time.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £23



Cave's unique hybrid of blues, gospel and art-rock makes for a live spectacle



20
GRINDERMAN
MUTE 2007

A side project containing some of The Bad Seeds, that seemed to come from nowhere. Midlife crisis or middle-age rebirth? Perhaps a touch of both, but the result was a thrilling one. A raw, raucous, grubby album with little production value, recorded on the quick, it seemed to inject new life into The Bad Seeds as a result.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £35

19
GET READY FOR LOVE
MUTE 2005

A sparky number that combines screeching guitar with huge backing vocals from a choir to result in a sort of gospel blues rock that seemed to capture a new-found sound and rejuvenation to the band. A track that neatly marries some of the band's underlying pop leanings with their noisy art-rock default setting.

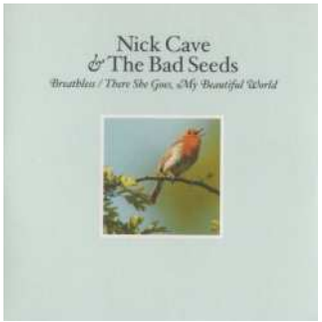
DISCOGS MEDIAN £12

18
GHOSTEEN
GHOSTEEN LTD 2019

Ghosteen is perhaps the most thematic and conceptual of all Bad Seeds records. Despite its clear two-part structure, in many ways our 2019 album of the year is like one big mood piece. There are no drums and little in the way of traditional structure, instead just ghostly synths and haunting atmospheres as Cave explores death, love and loss with immense beauty.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £20

RUNE HELLESTAD - CORBIS/GETTY



17
BREATHLESS/ THERE SHE GOES, MY BEAUTIFUL WORLD
MUTE 2004

The opening flutters of a flute are not a common occurrence in the world of The Bad Seeds, but *Breathless* is not typical in their canon. Unashamedly buoyant, its light and skippy percussive beat adds a sprightly step to a song that's an all-encompassing ode to love. The chorus doubles down on this lightness as it bursts into a sunshine-laden hook that results in one of the most conventionally pretty Bad Seeds tracks. On the flipside is one of the purest, most euphoric songs The Bad Seeds made, with some inspiration from Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £26

16
NO PUSSY BLUES
MUTE 2007

This ode to not getting any romp was the first track from Cave's side-project and remains one of the most exhilarating songs from their output. The opening typewriter key rattle is soon joined by gut-wobbling bass and squealing guitar, with eruptive blasts of noise peppering the song, as the protagonist lists all the ways in which he is not having any luck.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £9

15
SKELETON TREE
BAD SEED LTD 2016

Despite being written mostly before the event, this is an album that took on a note of tragedy when it coincided with the death of Cave's son. The making of it also was captured in the documentary *One More Time With Feeling*, and it remains one of the most devastating and special Bad Seeds albums.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £12

14
JUNKYARD
4AD 1982

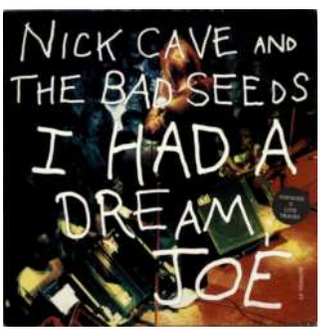
A big, brash, often daft album that captures The Birthday Party in full-throttle mode. Cave screams, howls and wails over electrifying guitar, gut-churning bass and drums that sound like they were recorded in a dungeon. It's the band having fun as much as it is them being bordering on terrifying.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £19

13
STRAIGHT TO YOU/JACK THE RIPPER
MUTE 1992

A track that some may feel veers a little close to pop territory for the prince of darkness, but a great one nonetheless. Cave's voice is in almost uplifting form here as organs glide, guitars strum in a sprightly skip, and the subtly rising melody results in a track that feels like a radio-friendly accessible moment whilst remaining within the band's unique sonic domain. Slapped on with the rollicking *Jack The Ripper* for extra oomph.

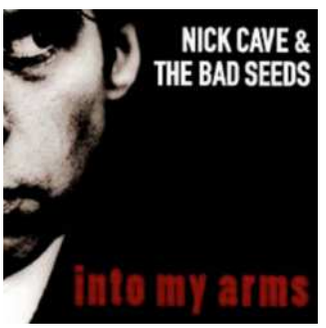
DISCOGS MEDIAN £10



12
I HAD A DREAM, JOE
MUTE 1992

The almost gospel opening, with vocal harmonies coalescing, gives way to a rapid blues-rock rhythm. Propelled by Mick Harvey's driving acoustic guitar and drums that clatter like an earthquake, it allows Cave to develop steam lyrically – making it sound unfathomable to spit so many words into a track without losing momentum.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £14

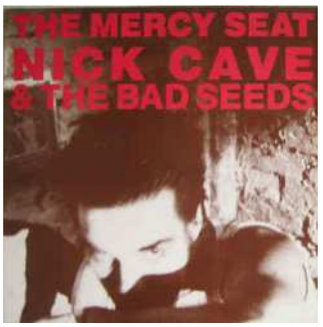


11
INTO MY ARMS
MUTE 1997

One of Cave's most beloved and well known songs. It's unlikely a Bad Seeds show will take place without its inclusion, and it's some of Cave's finest writing. Staggeringly beautiful, it plunges so much deeper than a simple piano ballad – the lyrical refrain of the chorus is so effective that it mirrors the embrace of the words.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £27

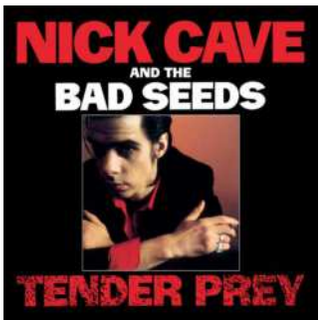
▶



10
THE MERCY SEAT
MUTE 1988

Cave's tale of a man on death row awaiting execution has been a staple in the band's set since its release. It's a beautiful marriage of Cave's narrative form and the music, with Mick Harvey's acoustic guitar the backbone. It takes on incredible steam, rising until the final key lyrical change that flips the song on its head.

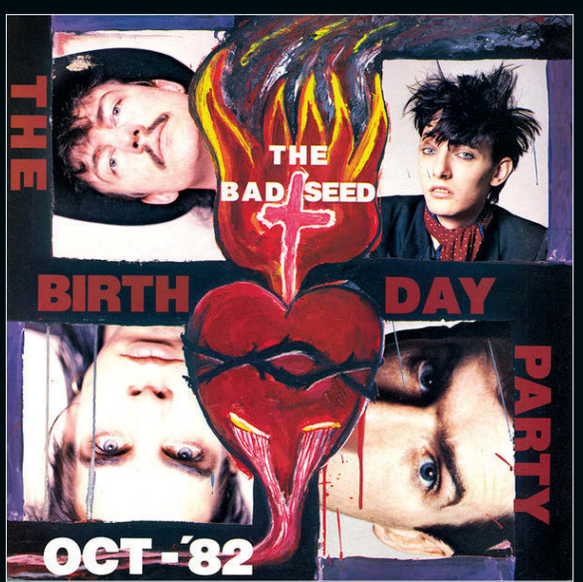
DISCOGS MEDIAN £9



9
TENDER PREY
MUTE 1988

An album that captured the band at a tense juncture, shortly before Cave spent time in Brazil. He recalled the making of it as a nightmare and a fractured experience, but it gave birth to classics such as *The Mercy Seat*, *Deanna* and *Up Jumped The Devil*. It also marked the end of early-period Bad Seeds in a way.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £21



8
THE BAD SEED EP
4AD 1983

After The Birthday Party kicked out their drummer Phill Calvert, they became a more focused and ferocious unit. Mick Harvey moved onto drums with urgency and Rowland S Howard's guitar work was allowed room to stun and electrify. A new sense of vivacity and punch was captured in the band here, as well as offering an early indication of Cave's blues tendencies.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £11

7
HENRY'S DREAM
MUTE 1992

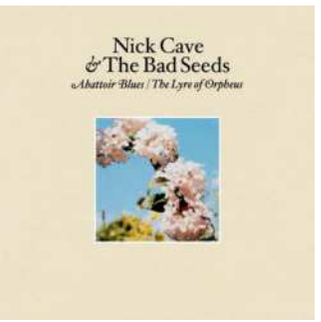
An album that the band themselves had a problem with due to the finished production by Neil Young's go-to guy David Briggs. It's certainly a record that highlights the acoustic side of the band, but the result is a forceful one and *Henry's Dream* bristles with momentum and punch. The first half of the album, in particular, is as neat a run as you'll find anywhere on a Bad Seeds album.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £50

6
PUSH THE SKY AWAY
BAD SEED LTD 2013

A real turning point for the band. Their first without long-time record label Mute and the one that would begin their ascent to arena status. Which is unusual because it contains some delightfully slow, woozy and tender songs that on paper don't lend themselves to such an environment. However, the songwriting is some of Cave's finest, as the band move into a more synth- and soundscape-heavy world.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £20



5
ABATTOIR BLUES/ THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS
MUTE 2004

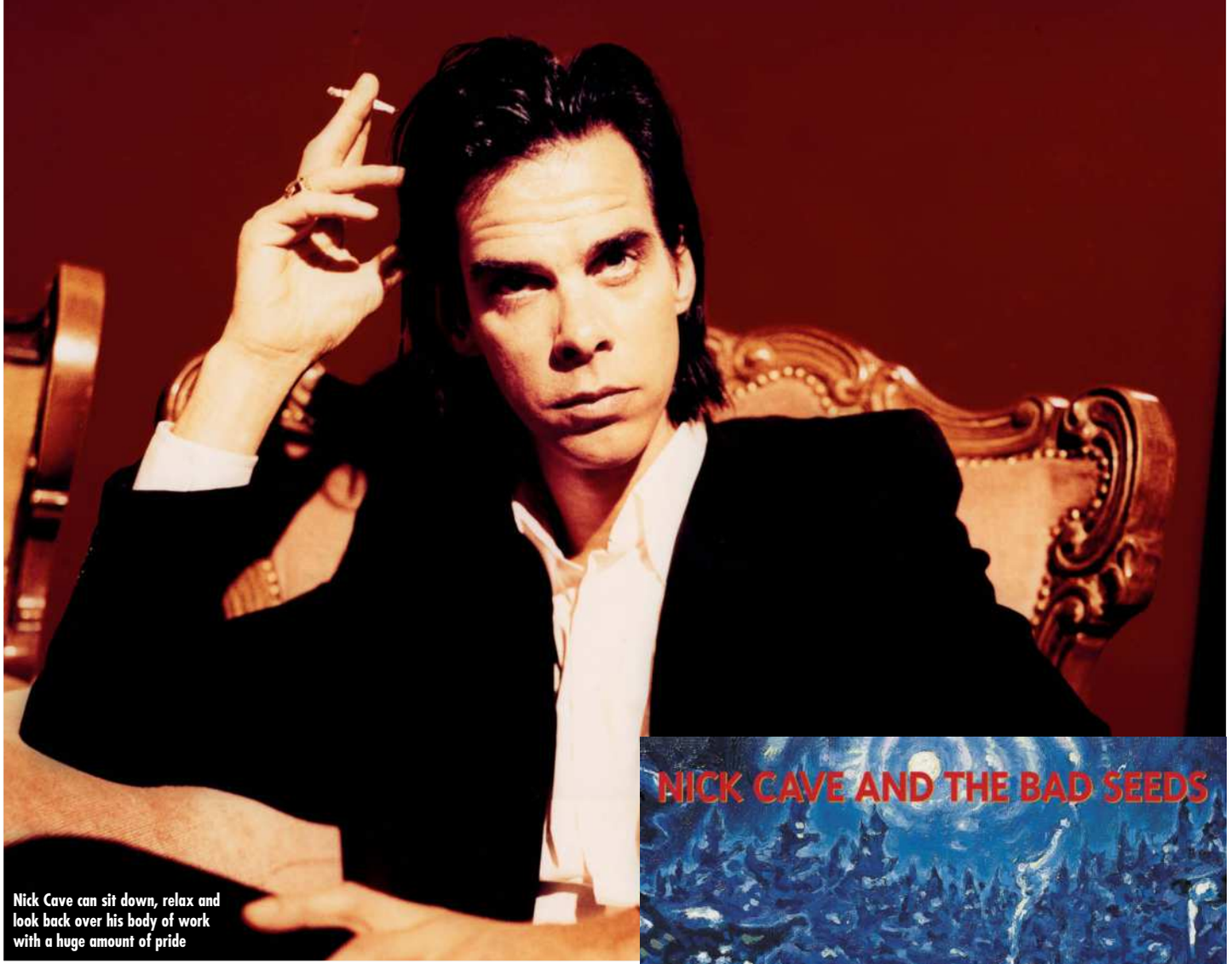
A double album that touches upon gospel, blues, rock and even pop. Blixa Bargeld's departure left the band open to explore territories that perhaps they couldn't have with him. Double albums are notorious for filler, but this truly is an exceptional example in which the slightly rockier *Abattoir Blues*, and the more restrained *The Lyre of Orpheus* combine to form a perfect double hit.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £60

4
MUTINY EP
MUTE 1983

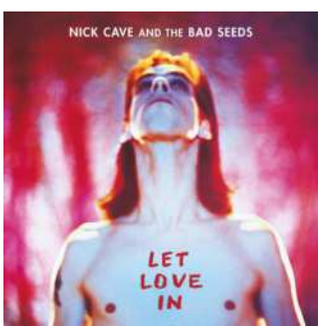
The Birthday Party's final moments, crippled by drug use, inner-band tensions and the gnawing feeling that time was up for them. However, what they managed to cough up as their farewell is, alongside *The Bad Seed* EP, their finest offering. The sound of a dying band put to record just before their implosion.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £22



Nick Cave can sit down, relax and look back over his body of work with a huge amount of pride

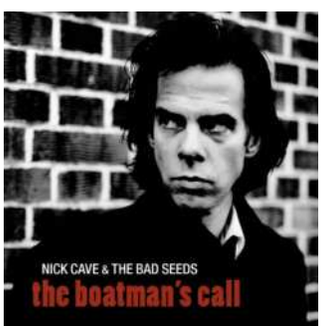
JOE DILWORTH/PHOTOSHOT/GETTY



3
LET LOVE IN
MUTE 1994

A solid recommendation if you want to start someone on their Bad Seeds journey with one album. It encompasses their career to date tonally, marrying ferocious noise with tender hooks, via that inescapable Bad Seeds sound that seems to radiate notably here. *Red Right Hand* gave the band something of a mini hit from this album, but there's much more to explore.

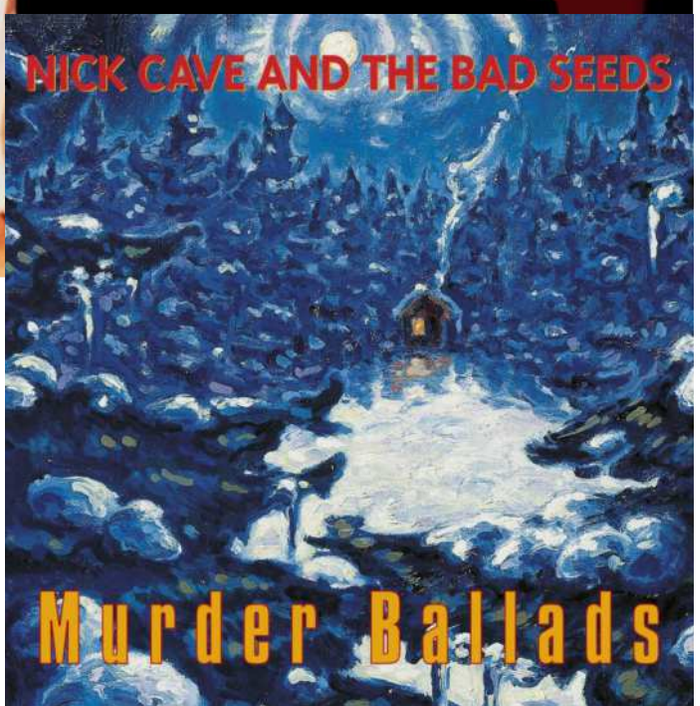
DISCOGS MEDIAN £57



2
THE BOATMAN'S CALL
MUTE 1997

Often credited unfairly as being an ostensible Nick Cave solo record. This album of largely piano ballads written in the wake of Cave's break-up from PJ Harvey is one of the finest Bad Seeds records. The band's contribution is deft, considered and thoughtful and it's a reminder they can be just as powerful in stripped-back, tender mode as they can in full-throttle assault. A masterpiece.

DISCOGS MEDIAN £68



1
MURDER BALLADS
MUTE 1996

Probably one of the most returned albums of the 1990s. After the Kylie Minogue-featuring *Where The Wild Roses Grow* did well and made people run out to buy the record (it remains the band's most successful to date), they were greeted with something much different. A brilliant, bloody, violent, angry and eruptive album of literal murder ballads that sees the band see-saw between screeching noise and death-filled vignettes.

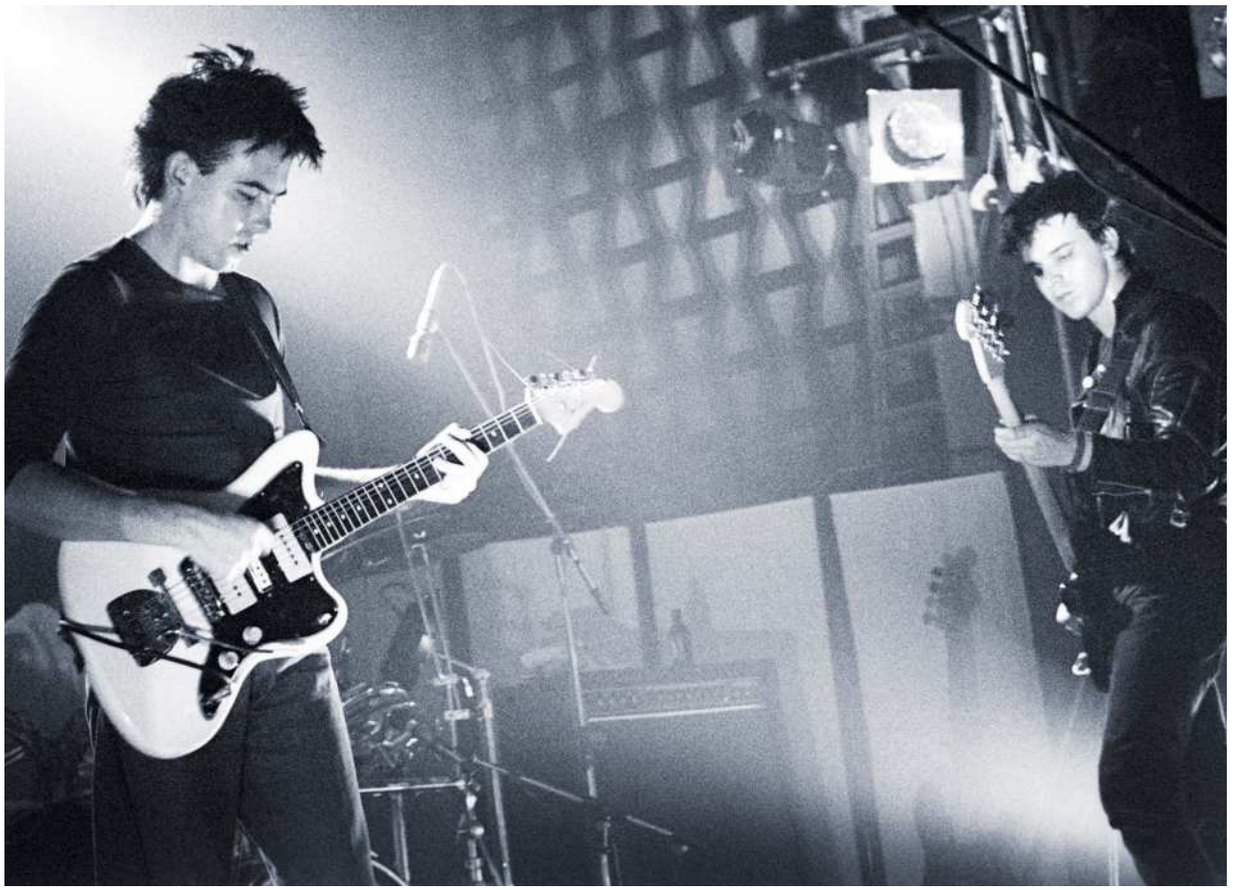
DISCOGS MEDIAN £45

CLASSIC ALBUM

THE CURE

SEVENTEEN SECONDS

A shadowy gloom has haunted The Cure since the release of 1980's *Seventeen Seconds*. Robert Smith curated an atmosphere that was otherworldly and unsettling, yet curiously comforting. Over the next 40 years, the band wrote some of the most effervescent pop songs ever recorded, yet the mood established here, as **Dan Biggane** discovers, is one they would ultimately return to again and again…



Robert Smith and Simon Gallup on stage in Belgium, October 1980

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY

While the discographies will maintain that 1979's *Three Imaginary Boys* is the debut album by The Cure, it's their sophomore full-length, *Seventeen Seconds*, which is truly an LP of firsts: it was the first record when frontman Robert Smith took control and the first time we were introduced to The Cure's trademark darkness. In the liner notes to the 2005 reissue of *Seventeen Seconds*, Smith openly admits: "I've always thought of *Seventeen Seconds* as our opening album, it was the first record I felt was really The Cure."

Sonically sparse, gone were the Buzzcocks-like post-punk leanings of *Three Imaginary Boys*. "I hate the first album, loathe it," Smith acknowledged to Johnny Black in an interview for *Penthouse* in the spring of 1982. "I loathed it when we were making it, but we were so glad to be allowed to make a record… I never imagined we'd make any more records after that album."

It is understandable that Smith had such a pessimistic outlook given the band's rapid ascent. Having performed regularly around Crawley between 1977 and 1978 as Easy Cure, the group had undergone a few line-up changes before settling as a three-piece with Smith (guitar and vocals), Lol Tolhurst (drums) and Michael Dempsey (bass). The band lost the Easy to become The Cure and an early demo would eventually land in the lap of Chris Parry, an A&R man at Polydor, who was looking for bands to release on his fledgling Fiction label.

Entering Morgan Studios with his newly signed band, Parry took control. "Chris told us to record every song we had, and we'd work out what went on the album afterwards," Smith told James Oldham in August 2004. "I trusted him, but in the end, he just chose what went on there… If we'd gone into the studio six months later, we'd have made a much better album."

Following the release of stand-alone single *Killing An Arab*, *Three Imaginary Boys* hit record stores in May 1979 and Smith immediately distanced himself. "The first LP in a lot of ways was like a compilation," the singer told *NME* journalist Paul Morley in 1980. Morley had savaged both *Three Imaginary Boys* and the band for their 'anti-image' stance in his review of the record, taking particular exception to the arty cover. "I thought the artwork was a bag of shite," Smith readily admitted in 2000. "Parry had this vision of the group that I reluctantly went along with. By the time it came out, I'd already written *M* and *Play For Today*, so I'd mentally divorced myself from it anyway."

Boys Don't Cry, another stand-alone single, was released in June 1979, but again failed to impress. However, as Smith told *Trouser Press*' Jon Young seven months later: "I would have hated it if *Boys Don't Cry* had become a big hit, because people would have expected more songs like it, which we are moving away from."

"The music scene was changing, moving forward into new territories," wrote Tolhurst in his autobiography *Cured: The Tale Of Two Imaginary Boys*. "We felt we were at the forefront of whatever was coming next." However, relationships within The Cure camp had begun to become strained…

JUMPING SOMEONE ELSE'S TRAIN

While supporting Siouxsie And The Banshees on a UK tour, irreparable fractures in Smith's relationship with bassist Dempsey had formed. When John McKay quit the Banshees mid-tour, Smith found himself both fronting The Cure and depping on guitar for the headliners.

"For the rest of that tour, The Cure part of the show was always uncommunicative and teeth gritted," Smith confessed to *Uncut* in 2000. "As soon as I got in the Banshees' van, it was

Simon Gallup replaced founder member Michael Dempsey on bass in 1979

BOB KING/REDFERNS/GETTY

all over. I think the final straw came when I played Michael ideas for the next album and he hated them."

The situation left Smith with a lot of anger and anguish to resolve, admitting: "I felt overcome, overwhelmed and very alone." Having decamped to his parents' house, Smith took comfort in sound. "I was listening to Bowie's *Low*, Nick Drake's *Five Leaves Left*, Jimi Hendrix's live *Isle Of Wight*, Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* and Khachaturian's *Gayane Ballet Suite*," he said. "I wanted The Cure to create a weird kind of hybrid music to somehow connect these five and for every song to work with as little instrumentation as possible."

"We were at the Smiths' house back in Crawley when Robert presented a cassette for us to hear," wrote Tolhurst. "I was amazed by the minimal beauty of the songs. Inside this preview of what would become *Seventeen Seconds*, I heard a glacial sonic landscape that mirrored my own lonely feeling at the time."

To capture the absolute isolation felt by both Smith and Tolhurst, the pair returned to Morgan Studios with Dempsey's replacement Simon Gallup on bass. The Cure were bolstered by the addition of Matthieu Hartley on keyboards and the almost complete removal of Parry from anywhere near the studio.

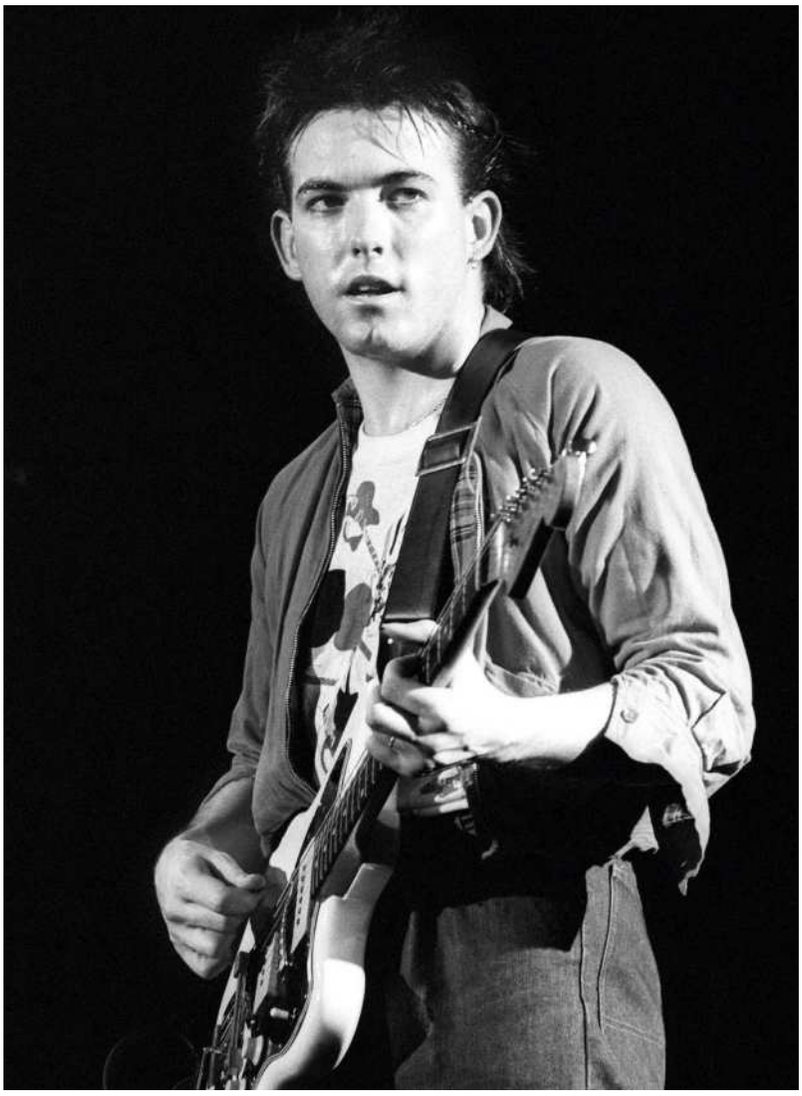
"With the money from *Three Imaginary Boys*, I bought 10 days of studio time," Smith told *Rolling Stone*. "We only used eight, so I got my money back for the last two, which was lucky 'cause we spent far more than I thought we would on beer."

The Cure were able to save time and money by sleeping on the studio floor. "We slept in the old Morgan Studio One, which was kind of creepy, as it used to be a church," said Tolhurst. "Above the new ceiling was an old stained-glass roof. When the studio was dark, it was visible in a ghostly kind of glow. At 4am, it looked almost otherworldly."

Smith knew exactly what he wanted to do on *Seventeen Seconds* and didn't want anyone to interfere with that. Left to their own devices, a sense of contentment set in as a resuscitated Cure completely submerged themselves in their art. The only other person allowed in was co-producer Mike Hedges. "Robert said to me he thought he and I could produce the record more to his liking than if a third party did it," Hedges told *Sound On Sound*'s Richard Buskin. "As an engineer, I was very keen to experiment, and Robert encouraged me to do this."

However, the album's emotional gravitas and pitch-black darkness weighed heavy on everyone involved. Hedges said: "It was so introspective and so depressing, it did us all in.

"THOUGH SINGLES AREN'T THAT IMPORTANT TO US, IT IS ALWAYS NICE IF YOU GET A HIT"
ROBERT SMITH



ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY

Robert had a cathartic outpouring of emotions on that album, and because of that it affected all of us."

On *Seventeen Seconds*, Smith blurred the lines between post punk and goth

COME CLOSER AND SEE

With the album in the can, *A Forest* was released as a single on 8 April 1980. The track broke the Top 40 and became The Cure's first chart success, reaching No. 31. As a result, the band found themselves on *Top Of The Pops* for the first time.

"It was a nice surprise that *A Forest* did so well," Smith told New Zealand publication *In Touch* in the summer of 1980. "Though singles aren't that important to us, it is always nice if you get a hit." The exposure that appearing on a programme such as *Top Of The Pops* would bring to such an 'anti-image' band like The Cure didn't go unnoticed. However, as Smith pointed out: "If we didn't do it, someone else would, and it made no difference to the majority of people watching whether we played or not."

Of course, The Cure would go on to become one of the most iconic and instantly recognisable groups of all time, and the whole 'image versus anti-image' quandary seems a little ridiculous today. Even in 1982, Smith was more than aware: "All that stuff blew up about the anti-image and I was totally unprepared. I couldn't believe or take it seriously."

However, for *Seventeen Seconds* the anonymity factor still loomed large, not least in the album artwork. Directed by

THE SONGS

CORE PERSONNEL

Robert Smith Guitar, vocals
Matthieu Hartley Keyboards
Lol Tolhurst Drums
Simon Gallup Bass

MAIN PRODUCTION CREDITS

Robert Smith and Mike Hedges

RECORDED

Morgan Studio One, London

RELEASED

22 April 1980, Fiction

1 A REFLECTION

Robert Smith's guitar gently weeps over a lonely piano. Welcome to *Seventeen Seconds*. This unsettling instrumental sets the mood for the next 35 minutes, 40 seconds. Deliberately disjointed, the fear factor is heightened towards the end by a harrowing, almost indecipherable, moan… Whatever it is, or is intended to be, the sound will chill you to the bone.

2 PLAY FOR TODAY

Following the uneasy start, we embrace Lol Tolhurst's sprightly drumbeat intro. "It really was the drum sound that largely defined the album's sonic direction," co-producer Mike Hedges told *Sound On Sound* in 2004. "The fact the drums had such little ambience and were so sterile set up the mood we loved," Hedges confirmed.

3 SECRETS

A song about longing, Smith's vocals appear only as a distant echo, lamenting a missed opportunity. "I catch your eyes in the dark/ One look relives the memory/ Remember me… the way I used to be." It is poignant poetry set against that glassy landscape established in *Play For Today* and an understated sadness that The Cure would return to over the next 40 years.

4 IN YOUR HOUSE

In a Q&A for *Cure News* fanzine, dated January 1989, Smith said the inspiration for the track came from "feeling uncomfortable in someone else's presence but still always returning." In 1980, Smith told the *NME*: "I find touring and things like that shut me down. I harden and get very reclusive. I'm not naturally an extrovert, but sometimes I get withdrawn and it irritates people… Sometimes I don't like talking to people."

5 THREE

Closing Side A, *Three* features an almost annoyingly inaudible vocal under the track's intro. Smith told *Creem* in 1986: "The voice was supposed to be so you could almost barely hear it." When played live, the band would sometimes close with a jam based on this song. In January 1981, Smith explained to *Trouser Press*' Jim Green how it would: "relieve the tensions of the day, once it lasted 45 minutes!"

THE SONGS
CONTINUED

6 THE FINAL SOUND
Described by Smith as Matthieu Hartley's elegy, Side Two's opener is a gloomy instrumental that lasts just 52 seconds but leaves a lasting impression. Because of financial restraints, *The Final Sound* should've been much longer, but was cut down when the tape ran out while recording. It remains a delightful Hammer Horror-esque prelude for…

7 A FOREST
The band's breakthrough hit landed The Cure in living rooms around the country courtesy of their debut on *Top Of The Pops*. Smith called it "a childhood dream/nightmare that came true with adolescence." Hedges reveals it was one of the last songs recorded for the album: "We wanted it to be quite ornate and it ended up being the most produced track on the album. To me, it always sounded like a single. We all thought it was an amazing song – I loved the guitar line – but we figured it would take a bit more work than the others." *NME*'s Julie Burchill complained The Cure were: "Trying to stretch a sketchy living out of moaning more meaningfully than any man has moaned before." *A Forest* is, as *Sounds*' Johnny Waller wrote, "a classic insidious masterpiece of understated drama, never resorting to obvious ploys for effect."

8 M
When asked in a *Cure News* Q&A what the inspiration was for *M*, Smith responded cryptically: "About a girl…". We can assume that the girl is his wife Mary, who he met at St Wilfrid's Comprehensive School aged 14, and nicknamed M. It's interesting to note, given Smith's response to that fanzine question, the similarity between the guitar chord progression of *M* and that of Nirvana's *About A Girl*, from their debut album *Bleach*.

9 AT NIGHT
A precursor to *Faith*, Smith borrows his lyric from an unsettling Franz Kafka prose piece of the same title. In Dave Thompson's book, *In Between Days: An Armchair Guide To The Cure*, Smith is quoted as saying: "I just lifted a few phrases, put them together and it made sense. And that was because I couldn't be bothered to write a song."

10 SEVENTEEN SECONDS
"Time slips away, and the light begins to fade…" opens a doleful Smith on a darkly evocative conclusion to an album already 50 shades of black. Smith admitted that "this isn't the LP to put on at a party or if you're having a fit of depression." In his autobiography, Tolhurst wrote: "Years later, when people would try to hold us responsible for someone's depression or even suicide, it seemed to me that they were missing the point. We created these songs to help alleviate those same feelings in ourselves."

The Cure headlining Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage in 2019

DAVE J HOGAN/GETTY

Smith, photographer Andrew Douglas managed to capture the LP's absolute introspective quality. "We did all the photos the day we finished recording, at about eight o'clock in the morning," Smith told *Rolling Stone*. "I said, 'could you do some that are out of focus' and they're the ones we used, because the ones in focus looked so hideous."

Tolhurst wrote: "The photos of the band were all blurred, which we felt correctly mirrored what we felt our fans should take from the album. We wanted people to focus on the music, the actual songs, not our appearance… I think if that had been the last the world had seen or heard of The Cure, then we would have made our mark. It meant that much to us."

Released on 22 April 1980, *Seventeen Seconds* reached No. 20 on the UK album chart. It is fair to say the rock press were not prepared for it: "To many, *Seventeen Seconds* may seem a valid progression. I, however, find it depressingly regressive," wrote Nick Kent in the *NME* before concluding, "even so, I await their next move with great interest."

An unsettled Chris Westwood wrote accurately in *Record Mirror*: "This is a reclusive, disturbed Cure, sitting in cold, dark, empty rooms..." While, in his favourable *Sounds* write-up, an on-the-money Phil Sutcliffe proclaimed: "With *Seventeen Seconds* they have courageously emphasised their extremes as a band of blue-grey mood and emotion with no easy thrills to offer," adding: "Smith portrays with rare intensity a metaphysical sense of isolation and loneliness."

Melody Maker writers were not so convinced. Reviewer James Truman offered that *Seventeen Seconds* "plays like a dismal TV drama: vaguely disorientating, fleetingly attractive and meaninglessly evocative," while fellow *MM* scribe Adam Sweeting didn't like the LP at all: "When *Seventeen Seconds* appeared, it came as a shock. Gone were the succinct and snappy songs, replaced by longer and less defined pieces. The prevailing mood was brown bleeding into grey."

That all considered, back in 1980 perhaps the most intriguing response would come from the *NME*'s Paul Morley. Having lambasted the band's debut, he called *Seventeen Seconds* "an extraordinary LP." In a feature entitled 'Days Of Wine And Poses', dated 12 July 1980, he wrote: "There is the quiet agony of love and loss, a constant sense of distance – between people, places, past and present. *Seventeen Seconds* is an LP of romantic melancholy, of anguish and finally horror."

In the same article, Smith confessed: "There is genuine emotion on there and whether people want to take it that way is up to them. I am not going to say you've got to believe me..."

"THE WHOLE THING WAS REINFORCED BY THE FACT IAN CURTIS HAD KILLED HIMSELF"
ROBERT SMITH

A MEASURE OF LIFE

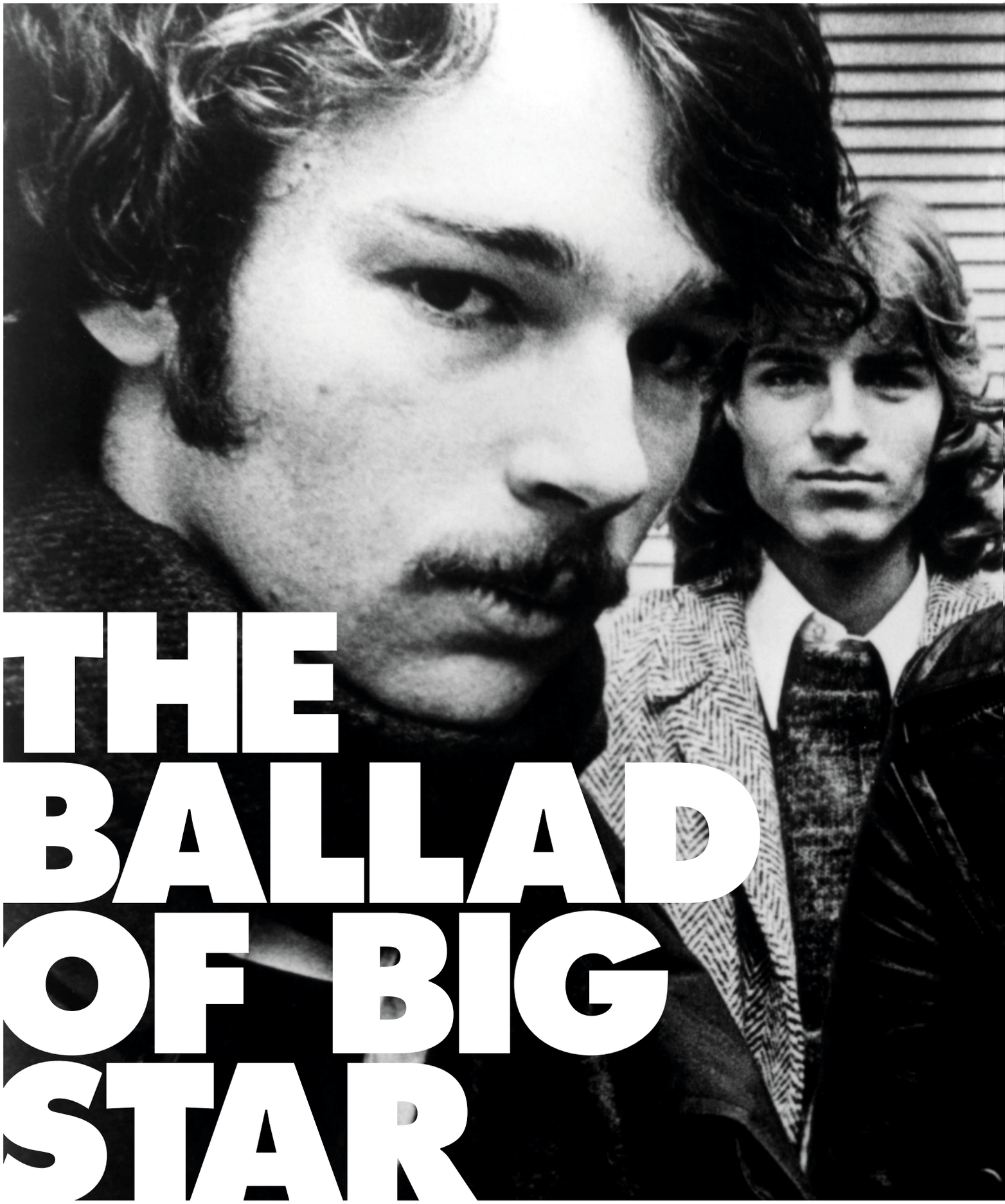
Following the release of *Seventeen Seconds,* much of the rest of 1980 was taken up with touring. However, the tragic suicide of Joy Division's Ian Curtis in May at the age of just 23 had a profound impact.

"I was 21, but I felt really old, older than I do now," revealed Smith retrospectively in an interview with *Uncut* magazine in 2000. "I had no faith in anything and genuinely felt that I wasn't going to be alive for much longer. I tried particularly hard to make sure I wasn't. The whole thing was reinforced by the fact that Ian Curtis had killed himself. I knew that The Cure were considered fake in comparison… If I wanted people to accept what we were doing, I was going to have to take the ultimate step."

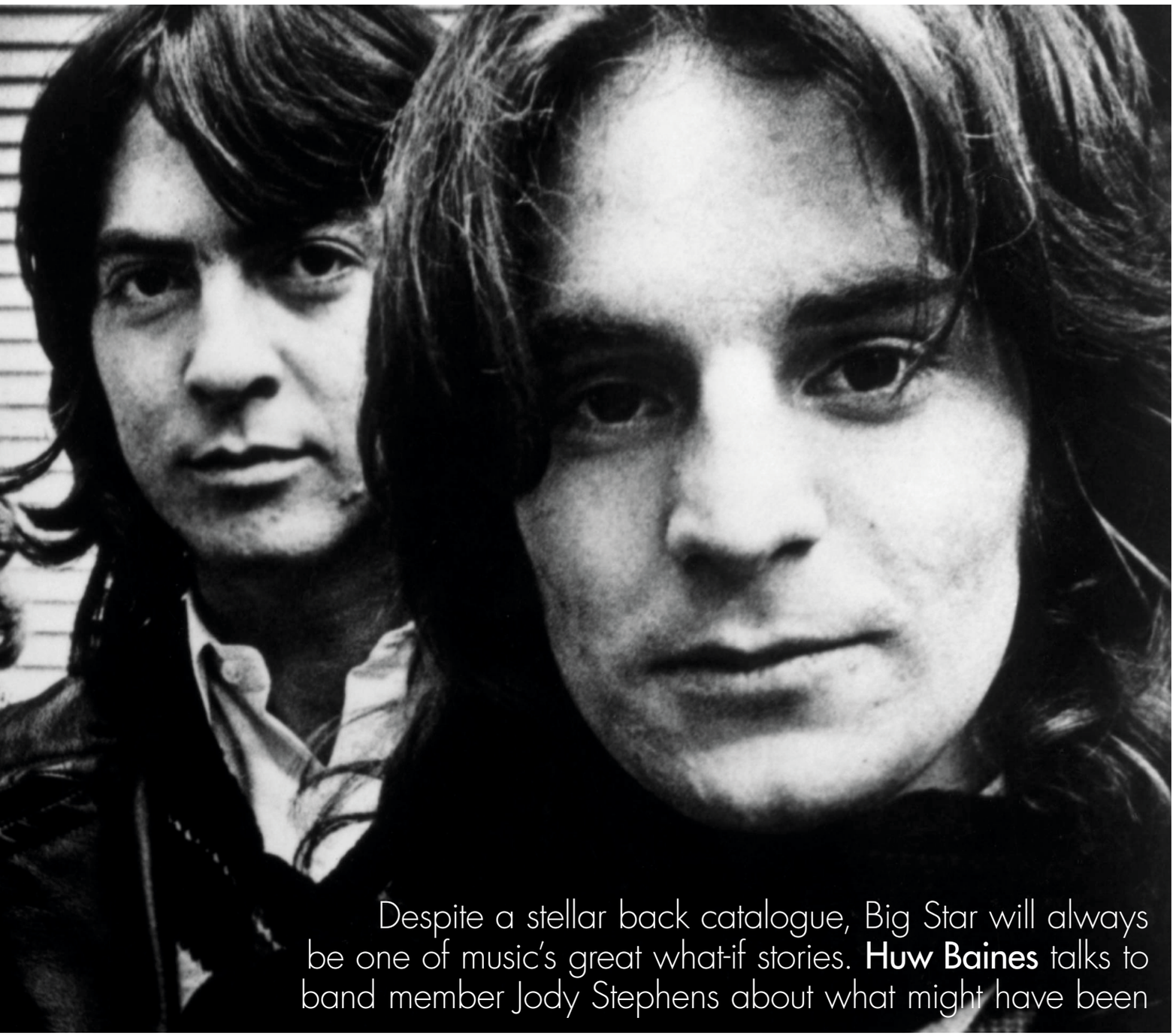
The melancholic mood surrounding The Cure escalated at the start of 1981. Smith's grandmother had suddenly passed away and Tolhurst's mother was terminally ill with cancer. The collective grief would materialise on the album *Faith* and only intensify on 1982's *Pornography*.

Thankfully, by his own admission, Robert Smith has subsequently found a "genuine passion for being alive", and The Cure have gone on to create some of the most incredible, multi-coloured pop songs: *The Love Cats*, *Just Like Heaven*, *The Caterpillar*, *Six Different Ways*, *Close To Me*, *Why Can't I Be You?*, *Pictures Of You*, *Mint Car*, *Never Enough* and *Friday I'm In Love*, to name a few… but dig a little deeper and you will still expose that creeping dark side first revealed on the magnificent *Seventeen Seconds*.

"During *Seventeen Seconds*, we honestly felt that we were creating something no one else had done," Smith confessed. "From this point on, I thought that every album was going to be the last Cure album, so I always tried to make it something that would be kind of a milestone. I feel *Seventeen Seconds* is one of few albums that genuinely achieved that." ●



THE BALLAD OF BIG STAR



Despite a stellar back catalogue, Big Star will always be one of music's great what-if stories. **Huw Baines** talks to band member Jody Stephens about what might have been

CHARLIE GILLETT COLLECTION/REDFERNS/GETTY

During Memorial Day weekend in 1973, the First Annual National Association of Rock Writers' Convention rolled into Memphis, Tennessee, dragging in its wake a who's who of critics out to drink their fill on Stax Records' dime. Around midnight at Lafayette's Music Room, one of the media set's pre-eminent hellraisers wound up on stage. Shitfaced, Richard Meltzer gripped the microphone and yelled: "Well, puke on ya momma's pussy! Here's Big Star!"

Big Star's story isn't prone to triumphalism, but the set that followed was a triumph. At the time, the band existed in a weird liminal space between their commercial wreck of a first record and the nebulous prospect of a second. Their founding guitarist, Chris Bell, had quit, and they were essentially operating as a new-look three-piece for one night only.

Once the house lights went down, these failed musicians played some of the greatest rock songs ever written – they opened with *Feel*, Alex Chilton performed *Thirteen* and *The Ballad Of El Goodo* solo, and they closed with *The Letter*, the one lasting hit from his Box Tops days – to a rare audience that ate up every last mouthful.

Towards the end of the show, they slipped in some new material that had to that point only been sketched in pencil. "We kind of came back together to play that show," drummer Jody Stephens remembers. "The response was pretty amazing. It was enough to motivate Alex to want to do another record."

Although weathered by time, this scene hasn't become any less remarkable. The sort of applause and lairy abandon that rang through the venue has greeted lesser bands on thousands of nights, but in this context it's a lighthouse that illuminates the bittersweet core of Big Star's existence.

"Basically, in the mid-1970s, the only people on the planet who knew Big Star were rock critics and record store clerks," R.E.M.

Big Star (and a couple of Posies) lounge about with fan Mike Mills of R.E.M. backstage at The Fillmore in 2002

ANTHONY PIDGEON/REDFERNS/GETTY

guitarist Peter Buck, one of the countless musicians to take influence from Big Star after the fact, observed in the liner notes to 2009's *Keep An Eye On The Sky* boxset.

The band's short career is a tragedy that wears its heartbreak and dysfunction lightly. A decade on from the deaths of Chilton and bassist Andy Hummel, and 42 from the loss of Bell, their music still glimmers with hope, promise and longing.

Their first two albums, *#1 Record* and *Radio City*, are unimpeachable rock classics, and *Third* is among the great experimental works in the pop firmament. "Big Star was some sort of ultimate guitar band, I guess," Chilton told *Melody Maker* in 1985. "I don't think that people will make a guitar band sound better than we made our band sound."

SHOOTING FROM THE HIP

Big Star formed in early 1971, when Chilton drifted back to Memphis after a successful spell in New York following the dissolution of The Box Tops, the blue-eyed soul hitmakers he began fronting in his mid-teens. Now in his early 20s, he wandered into the orbit of the Stax-affiliated Ardent Studios, where Bell, Hummel and Stephens were regulars, either learning the recording ropes from owner John Fry or working on music as Icewater, a covers band that dabbled in original material. "I know Chris was pursuing Alex to join the band," Stephens recalls. "Alex came to see us at the VFW Hall in downtown Memphis. Apparently, he liked what he saw."

Bell, a studio geek with a head for pop arrangements and an obsession with instrumental textures, tuned into Chilton's quietly majestic New York compositions. They came from different sides of the city – Bell from the well-heeled suburbs, Chilton from a bohemian home populated by visiting musicians and artists – and had contradictory approaches to their work, but they shared once-in-a-lifetime chemistry.

"It was magic," Stephens admits. "These guys were well studied players, very melody-oriented. They would form a guitar line, and I would liken it to just forming a sentence. Some people can form more interesting sentences than others. It's just the way the words come out. It's the same with a musician. It's just the way these notes come out."

Ardent provided them with a canvas. Fry started the studio and label in 1959, while still in his teens, and by the time Big Star lifted their winking name from a local grocery store chain he was earning a rep as a meticulous, sympathetic producer. They handled overflow work from Stax, hosting major names in their low-key storefront and later at a purpose-built downtown facility, and let these shaggy-haired outsider kids work after hours. "John Fry was definitely a member of the band if you want to count people who influenced the way you hear Big Star," Stephens says. "His engineering and mixing – just a brilliant set of ears."

By the summer of 1972, with Bell's perfectionist streak and Fry's studio savvy

"I DON'T THINK THAT PEOPLE WILL MAKE A GUITAR SOUND BETTER THAN WE MADE OUR BAND SOUND"

Big Star partying in the 70s: Jody Stephens, Andy Hummel and Alex Chilton

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

having mingled with Chilton's shoot-from-the-hip creativity, the band had a real-life album on their hands. Accidentally tipping their hat to the clusterfuck that followed, they called it *#1 Record*.

The songs were diamonds. The reviews were ecstatic. The shows were empty. No one in Memphis cared. The airwaves were heaving with the sounds of heavy rock.

To add to the mess, Ardent's distribution tie-up with Stax was a non-starter and very few copies found their way to stores. The sales were pitiful. "I didn't seem to focus on that too much," Stephens remembers. "I loved playing. The reward was making a great record."

Others didn't share Stephens' philosophical view. Bell, in particular, was crestfallen when *#1 Record* stalled. "Chris's whole focus in life was to succeed as a musician and an artist," Stephens adds. "He was truly disappointed. Alex had some comments, but I don't think he dwelled on it."

Frustrated by the press attention lavished on Chilton, Bell tumbled into a deep depression. By the autumn, he'd decided to quit, divvying up work-in-progress arrangements with his erstwhile bandmates. After a particularly vociferous argument, Bell kicked in Fry's car and attempted to erase the *#1 Record* masters. Thwarted, he tried to kill himself by swallowing a cocktail of pills.

"The psychiatric floor of Baptist Hospital was like a prison," Fry lamented in *Big Star: The Story of Rock's Forgotten Band*. "It was frightening even to visit. Then Chris was moved to Mid-South Hospital, which was a psychological and rehabilitation facility with a more residential atmosphere."

Big Star had two more classics in their locker, and a stacked corner with Fry flanked by true believers such as Ardent's publicity man John King, but never again would they sound so wide-eyed and sonically pristine. Bell was the band's dreamer. His death in a 1978 car crash left behind a tiny, almost flawless body of work (including his posthumous solo LP *I Am The Cosmos*) that enshrined him as one of pop's great overlooked talents.

Shorn of Bell as a sounding board and construction engineer, Big Star coasted on, writing new material and playing sparsely attended one-off shows. Between loves, as he so often was, Chilton got into Quaaludes and started drinking more heavily, often winding up at Ardent cutting demos in the early hours with a cavalcade of collaborators.

Despite his lacerating self-criticism, these nocturnal reveries resulted in songs such as *Mod Lang*, *She's A Mover* and *What's Going Ahn*, which would form the backbone of 1974's *Radio City*, the Big Star LP that duly followed their rapturous convention set. "We thought, 'We've got another shot at this'. So we took it," Stephens says.

But Big Star still couldn't catch a break. The album was another masterwork, and home to one of pop music's crowning glories in *September Gurls*, but Stax's deal with Columbia Records had permanently gone sideways. Columbia boss Clive Davis was fired, Stax bled out, and Ardent was cut adrift. *Radio City* went nowhere fast. After honouring a run of dates at Max's Kansas City in New York, Hummel walked.

"Again, we got a lot of really good press," Stephens says. "We encountered the same sort of thing with the records not being in stores. It was disappointing. But I'd been able to go back in the studio with Alex and Andy and make this great record. I love *Radio City* just like I love *#1 Record*."

Chilton slipped further into drink and drugs, entering a prodigious period of radical writing that rode the rails of his relationship with 18-year-old Sarah Lawrence student Lesa Aldridge. Their affair was characterised by emotional extremes and physical violence on both sides of the ledger. Stephens, meanwhile, was dating Aldridge's sister, Holliday, in the background.

The Sister Lovers project that became *Third* pushed Chilton into territory that he'd mine for the rest of his career. It was open-ended, self-destructive, beautiful and challenging. It snapped his relationship with Fry in two (his engineering fingerprints are still all over it, and he mastered the recordings at the request of producer Jim Dickinson) and left gin and blood all over the console at Ardent.

It was also the final straw for Stephens, who eventually baulked at the druggy mayhem. "There's nothing like being part of a creative experience in a recording studio," he says. "I got together with Alex again just to be part of that. I didn't stick around long afterward, but I'm glad I did it."

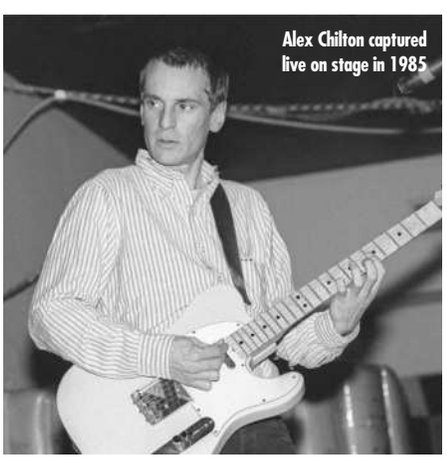
FALLING APART

Third dredged up some things that had been kept below the surface on earlier Big Star records. Its emotions were raw and unrefined, and some compositions disintegrated in listeners' hands like burnt letters. "They're constantly on the verge of falling apart," Stephens posits.

Chilton and Stephens went on the road with Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow as Big Star from 1993

Going one better than their previous records, this one was never definitively sequenced and wasn't released at all. It eventually emerged on Aura/PVC Records in 1978, after Chilton had moved back to New York and embraced the city's nascent punk scene. He played CBGB with The Cossacks, produced the first Cramps record and, in 1980, released his no wave-leaning solo debut *Like Flies On Sherbert*.

Some of the sadness found in Big Star's music springs from the sense of rejection it conjures. Firstly, there's the music industry's indifference and the listening public's trickle-down ignorance. Secondly, there's Bell's exit and Chilton's rubbishing of his own music at every turn. He was an artist in perpetual motion, always reluctant to acknowledge any past successes. He dismissed *Third* as regressive nonsense but, dude, Bruce Springsteen built a 50-year career on sentiments not a million miles removed from, "Would you be an outlaw for my love?"



Alex Chilton captured live on stage in 1985

"I DON'T KNOW THAT THERE'S AN END YET TO THE BIG STAR STORY"

Chilton continued to rage against his roots, with his jazzy solo work after getting sober and working a string of day jobs in his new home, New Orleans. But Big Star always found pockets of interest. The *NME* loved them, leading to a 1978 double LP reissue of their first two records. The Replacements penned a power-pop classic of their own and called it *Alex Chilton*. College rockers, twee popsters and shoegazers all flocked to their neglected altar.

In 1993, Jon Auer and Ken Stringfellow of The Posies filled out a four-piece version of Big Star with Chilton and Stephens. They released an LP called *In Space* in 2005, and toured until Chilton's death in 2010. His *Rolling Stone* obituary fixated on a show at Brooklyn's Masonic Temple four months earlier, specifically on the smile he wore throughout. "There was an honesty there that Alex would never speak," Stephens said at the time. "But he would show it on his face."

These days, Stephens still works at Ardent and plays semi-regularly with Big Star's Third Live, an orchestral spectacle with a revolving cast that has included members of R.E.M., Teenage Fanclub, Cat Power and more. "I don't know that there's an end yet to the Big Star story," he says. "It's begat other things that keep Alex and Chris and Andy in the contemporary part of people's minds." ●

REISSUE CITY

The collective shrug that greeted Big Star's releases in real time has led to their music becoming prime reissue real estate. Beginning in the late 70s and continuing through Rykodisc's CD version of *Third* in 1992, their three LPs have been repackaged and fine tuned almost constantly since the band folded. In early 2020, Craft Recordings put out fresh 180g versions of *#1 Record* and *Radio City* featuring a hometown spin thanks to analogue mastering by Jeff Powell at Memphis's Take Out Vinyl and manufacturing at Memphis Record Pressing.

"I work at Ardent Studios and we had a gentleman in from New Jersey for a tour and he was talking about seeing new people turned on to Big Star," Stephens says. "Having these reissues helps spread the word. It perpetuates that connection with an audience, and that makes it all worthwhile. I have a group called Those Pretty Wrongs, and at the end of the day people have to like the music that we make, but they listen to it because I was in Big Star. I get to do Those Pretty Wrongs and Big Star's Third Live with some really good friends and I get to stay connected with these audiences. It's a bridge to relationships."

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY CLAYTON CAIL/REDFERNS/GETTY

Choice Cuts #36

RUSH

RUSH

MOON RECORDS 1974

Original copies of this sought-after debut surface once in a blue Moon. **Glen Bushell** is in a Rush to find one

Rush are one of the biggest prog-rock bands in the world, but their beginning was as humble as any act looking for a break. After several line-up changes, the first official incarnation of the band was formed, featuring Alex Lifeson on guitar, Geddy Lee on bass/vocals and John Rutsey on drums. Struggling to find a label and management, Rush formed their own independent company, Moon Records, and prepared to release their debut album.

The self-titled album would be released on 1 March 1974 in Canada through label Moon Records, and only 3,500 copies were pressed with the MN-100 catalogue number. Original copies can be distinguished by white labels with a blue Moon Records logo at 12 o'clock and black text below the spindle hole. The sleeve on original pressings also has the Rush logo in red on the front and rear of the sleeve.

Two singles were released from the album, *Finding My Way* and *In The Mood*, but it was *Working Man* that became the sleeper hit for Rush, and gave way to the record being picked up by WMMS Radio in Cleveland, Ohio. The popularity of the band's debut in the area led to it being reissued by Mercury, with very early, red label pressings almost as hard to find as the Moon Records incarnation. That version was pressed from the same MN-100 stampers as the original release.

Subsequent pressings that followed were remixed for better sound quality, and released on the blue and silver Mercury labels. A printing error meant that the band's logo on the front and rear of the sleeve appeared more magenta than the red of previous issues.

The rest, as they say, is history, and Rush went on their way to stardom, going on to become one of the most influential rock bands of all time.

WAX FACTS

RUSH
RUSH
MOON RECORDS
BLACK VINYL
1974

£1,000

ROBERT FISHER

After graduating, Robert Fisher worked his way up to Geffen Records, taking the role of art director. **Giacomo Lee** discovers the story behind his *Nevermind* sleeve and what it was really like working with Kurt Cobain

A baby and a buck submerged in water. The shaggiest of dogs caught in mid-air. An anatomy of an angel. Iconic covers from some of the most famous albums of the 1990s, and Robert Fisher was behind all of them, each as ingrained in pop culture as the music itself.

But there's more where that came from, and Robert has recently opened up his archive, with Instagram account Nirvana Bucket giving Nirvana fans old and new a chance to pore over sights less seen.

"I was posting a mix of old and new work, and whenever I posted old Nirvana bits with stories behind the process it seemed there was a lot of interest from fans," Robert tells *Long Live Vinyl*, referring to the Instagram profile for his design agency Flying Fish Studio.

"I began to realise I had a lot of Nirvana stuff saved and I didn't want it to take over my work feed. So I started Nirvana Bucket as a proper place to share and archive it all."

MEMORIA, MEMORIA

The account is a regular stream of unused sleeve mock-ups, promo material and various oddities (a toddler-sized *Nevermind* T-shirt is one peculiar relic). Robert links it all back to his childhood skateboarding around LA, dumpster diving behind record stores.

"I would always bring home promotional stuff and ephemera to hang on my walls," he explains. "I guess it always had some sort of special value to me as a kid, and that probably was the start of my dream of working in the music industry.

"When I worked at Geffen, I stored away every little promotional item and tons of stuff from all the things I worked on. I sometimes forget what an impact Nirvana had on the world and that there are kids out there like I was who are enthralled with the artwork and stories behind it. I guess I'm just paying it forward, one fan to another."

Robert studied at Otis College Of Art And Design prior to working at Geffen Records; he was hired by the label upon graduating in the late 80s, creating during his time there visual identities not just for all of its Nirvana releases but also for bands such as Urge Overkill, Swervedriver and Teenage Fanclub.

The role was a dream come true for the young designer, a lover of music and music artwork since childhood. "I remember in maybe fourth grade my sister and I would save up our allowance and buy albums," he says. "We had this little stereo on a cart we'd share between our rooms, and I would sit in my beanbag chair with headphones on and just stare at album sleeves.

"The Beatles' *White Album* came with a poster that had so many little photos it was mesmerising. Later, I was really into Led

NIRVANA
NEVERMIND 1991
In another universe, this cover would have been of a baby being born underwater, as Kurt originally envisioned. In this universe, the cover has seen countless parodies and homages. "The Rolling Stones Simpsons one was cool; I was always a big fan of The Simpsons," says Robert when listing his favourite reworkings. "There was also that recent one, where some artist did a statement on the polluting of our oceans and put a bunch of trash mixed in with baby Spencer. I thought that was well done."

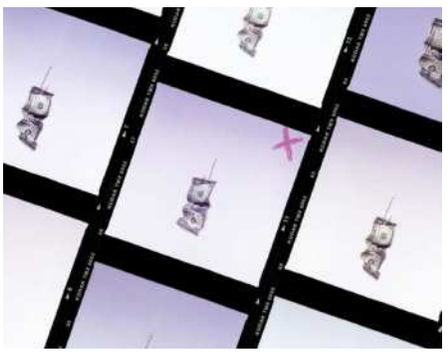
Zeppelin, Yes and Pink Floyd art. That's all really before I had a concept of graphic design or the people behind the designs."

"Later, in art college," he continues, "I had a few teachers, such as Mick Haggerty and Tim Eames, who worked in the music industry, that I really looked up to. During my studies, I was influenced by Neville Brody, David Carson and Vaughan Oliver. I would buy anything on 4AD just for the sleeve design."

NOODLES & DOODLES

Robert's history with Kurt Cobain saw the designer and musician talk all things art and design, but influences on the look of Nirvana sleeves stemmed more from Kurt's interests, as opposed to any classic covers or visual creatives.

"We never really sat down to formulate a master plan for each release," Robert explains. "I recently watched an old interview of Kurt talking about some of the music videos they did, and he mentioned that he liked to work with people that would not only get his vision but also bring their own ideas and surprise him with things he wasn't thinking of. He often gave me a lot of freedom to do whatever."



Kurt Cobain suggested adding a fish hook to the image of a baby swimming underwater to make it look more menacing. The ingenious idea of attaching it to a dollar bill came later

"With *Incesticide,* for example, I showed up to my office after lunch one day and there waiting for me was this large green painting in my office with a note that he wanted this to be the cover. That was it.

"I sat with it for a few days to let it soak in. I probably at first thought it was kind of ugly, but after a while I started to appreciate it. It can be a bit stressful having to create something with another artist's work without really having any kind of discussion about it, and throw in the fact that it's for a band that's blowing up like Nirvana, with millions of fans

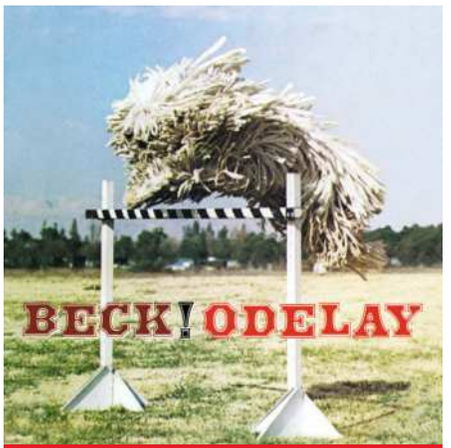
"WE NEVER REALLY SAT DOWN TO FORMULATE A MASTER PLAN"

NIRVANA
COME AS YOU ARE 1992
"All Kurt said was he liked microscopic organisms and the colour purple," explains Robert. "I just ran with it from there." The X-ray you see in the cover is actually of Robert when he broke his nose in middle school. The image also graced a songbook for the track, which Fisher's proudly posted to Nirvana Bucket.

NIRVANA
IN UTERO 1993
There's more than one version out there of this album's artwork, including a 'dark mode' spin by Fisher made for the LP's 20th anniversary re-release.

On its release, several American retailers took offence at the foetus collage on the album's back cover, refusing to stock it as a result. Fisher was henceforth asked to crop out the offending figures, but only for the Walmart and Kmart CD editions.

BECK
MELLOW GOLD 1994
Beck's first album to fuse his noise-freak roots with Gen-X college rock features an aptly bric-a-brac cover. The bizarro sculpture at its gnarly centre was made by Eddie Lopez, a member of Beck's artist circle at the time. Photographer Ross Harris shot the artwork in Lopez's garage before a more apocalyptic background was swapped in, as befitting the sculpture's name of 'Survivor From The Nuclear Bomb'.



BECK
ODELAY 1996
Beck chose the cover shot of a shaggy Komondor leaping over a hurdle, but the artwork would have much less of an impact without Robert's art direction, from the typography to the art collage of the package as a whole.

In a twist of fate, the shot used was taken in the 1970s by a photographer, who, at the time Fisher needed clearance from, was based only a few blocks away from the Geffen offices.

waiting for it. In those situations, you have to let your subconscious aesthetic judgement lead the way, or you could overthink it and freak out.

"I knew *Incesticide* wasn't gonna be slick and clean like *Nevermind*. I didn't even feel that the Nirvana logotype was right for it. Looking for other options, I went down to the hardware store and bought those letters for a mailbox. The shape of the main figure with the crazy, long noodle-like arms and legs inspired me to buy a bag of alphabet noodles for the type and song titles."

While Kurt allowed Fisher the greatest of creative freedoms when it came to art direction, actual art in itself was more precious for Cobain.

"I once had a friend do an illustration for a postcard for their first time on *Saturday Night Live*," Fisher says, harking back again to 1992. "It came out cool, and everyone was happy, but I do remember later hearing Kurt didn't like illustrations for their art unless he did them. Makes total sense, though."

That said, Cobain was happy with Robert's creations, Nirvana's smiley logo being one example. Fisher originally drew a few versions of it, including one with dollar signs for eyes; the sickly face we all know today began its life on a promo shirt sent out to radio stations. That trust in Fisher has carried across all of the band's releases since, including Kurt-focused compilations such as 2015's *Montage Of Heck*. It's even included albums that never saw the light of day.

VERSE CHORUS VERSE

During his trawl through the archives for Nirvana Bucket, Robert was surprised to find a printout of work he started for *Verse Chorus Verse*, a double album that was to contain the acclaimed *MTV Unplugged* performance on one disc and a mix of live songs on the other.

"After Kurt's passing, it eventually got scrapped and just *Unplugged* was released," he recalls. "There has been so much mystery online about *Verse Chorus Verse* and what and where the original songs were from. I had some fans reach out and ask if I ever started working on it, and I totally forgot I did.

"Then one day, I found this old printout taped together of the beginnings of the design for it and I was like, 'Holy crap'. It had all the original copy and info on the songs, so people could finally see what they were going to be."

The ill-fated *Verse Chorus Verse* would eventually morph into *From The Muddy Banks of The Wishkah*, a collection of totally different

Fisher in early dollar-bill related artistic endeavour as a child, years before his famous *Nevermind* sleeve for Nirvana

live recordings released in 1996. The same year, Robert found himself aligned with another groundbreaking Geffen Records album in the form of *Odelay*, the early Beck masterpiece that saw Hansen vault into the mainstream, much like the cover's jumping dog.

"Beck was a bit more involved with his artwork [than Kurt], especially as his career progressed. His grandfather was an experimental artist, so he came from that world and had more of an opinion.

"He would regularly come over to my house and we'd sit at the computer and make digital collages and work on the insides. He would let me throw in my ideas as well."

BIG TRANSFORMATION

The swerve in 1990s alternative from the raw honesty of Cobain to Hansen's cryptic cool might be seen as a radical change in music trends, and Robert's work in the years since for the likes of No Doubt and Weezer perhaps reflects a bolder demand for colour and personalities rather than artistic works and statements.

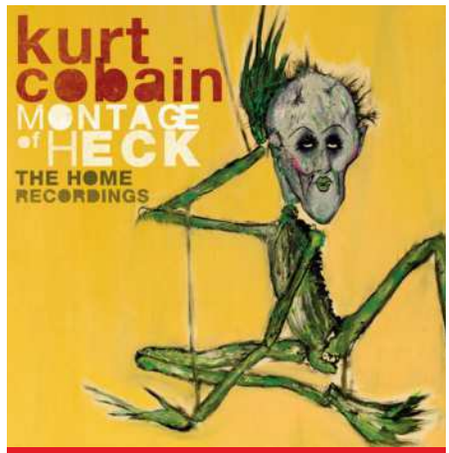
However, the biggest transformation that Robert has witnessed in the industry over his three decades in the business relates more to patterns of consumer behaviour than it does to branding.

"On one hand, I love how now you can listen to almost any song or album immediately. But on the other, the instant accessibility of streaming almost cheapens the experience when compared to hunting down an album at a store and having that tactile LP or CD in your collection.

"I really love that vinyl has made such an impressive comeback and I'm beyond glad that I was able to hang on to all my albums over the years. Yes, I'm biased, but it's the artwork that wouldn't let me part with them. They can be a bit of a ball and chain every time you move house, but the moment you pull out a Mint condition 70s Led Zeppelin bootleg with beautiful sleeve design… and it's all worth it to me."

No doubt, many collectors experience the exact same feeling when pulling out a Robert Fisher-designed classic sleeve from a stack of albums.

NIRVANA
INCESTICIDE 1996
"The duck on the back came about because I had these macro extension rings for an old 33mm camera and I was into shooting stuff close-up. I had a collection of toys and figures, one of which was a duck. The bright yellow/orange was in such contrast to the sickly green on the front that it was interesting to me. I put it all together and it was approved first go. Kurt liked it."



KURT COBAIN
MONTAGE OF HECK: THE HOME RECORDINGS 2015
"For this, I mainly worked with Vartan Kurjian over at UME. The main cover was already done from the film's one sheet, so it was mostly putting together all the inside stuff and special little features. We did a cassette for that, and that was a flashback. I hadn't designed a cassette in a very long time."

Fisher's design for the 1992 Geffen compilation *Sludge*, featuring Teenage Fandub and Nirvana

WEEZER
WEEZER (RED ALBUM) 2008
The third of Weezer's self-titled 'colour trilogy' came from Fisher having fun with the band during three days of photoshoots. He placed in a red background as a back-up plan after the album's original title of *The Pure Sounds Of Weezer* was promptly jettisoned by the band.

Winyl

MANNINGTREE

After decades working in music retail and gaining experience of the wine industry, Steve Tattam combined his profession and his passion with the launch of Winyl. **Christopher Barrett** samples what's in store

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIEL JONES

Located in England's smallest town, Manningtree, on the River Stour in north Essex, the suitably diminutive Winyl has proven a big hit with locals since it was launched in October 2018 by former Virgin and Our Price employee Steve Tattam.

As the name suggests, Winyl is a cunning combination of its founder's greatest pleasures; vinyl and wine. Selling a selection of vegan and organic wine and craft beer, alongside a handpicked range of new and second-hand vinyl, Tattam encourages visitors to enjoy a beverage or two while playing records on the store's Audio-Technica deck.

Winyl hosts a monthly Singles Club, where participants are encouraged to bring their own records along to play and discuss in the shop. Tattam admits the club nights have included some confused participants who take a little while to realise they are more likely to find an album by Love than romance in the shop.

Winyl also hosts a Songwriting Circle that sees local musicians and any other interested parties turn up and jam in the store. Such has been the success of this unique little shop that it is already drawing visitors from outside the area, while its reputation saw Winyl become one of only two record shops to be shortlisted for the Indie Retail Best Small Shop awards at the House Of Commons last year.

Winyl is no part-time hobby for Tattam either, the store is a carefully crafted concept, the culmination of 20 years in music retailing and a period specialising in duty free wine. After an unsatisfying stretch working in the corporate veterinary business, Tattam knew it was time to make a change. He says: "I had had a few interviews in the corporate world and couldn't feel it anymore; spending all of these hours doing it for someone else was exhausting. I thought, 'I have worked for a long time for other people, let's see what I can achieve for myself'.

"I had hit 50, and was sat at home having a glass of wine while thinking back to when I was at my happiest. I realised it was when I was working with records, before the job had become too management-led. So I came up with the idea of combining wine and vinyl. The name Winyl sprung to mind and I quickly went online to see if it had been taken. Luckily, it hadn't."

Having hooked up with some old contacts from his Virgin and Our Price days, Tattam set about finding a location for his shop.

"Manningtree hit a lot of right notes," he recalls. "It has a mainline train station, so you are only an hour from London, and there is a really strong community here who get the concept. It is almost a suburb of London because so many people commute.

"We had a guy from BBC Essex in the other day for an interview and he said, 'I would expect to see something like this in Shoreditch'."

Being self-funded, Tattam appreciated the freedom that results from not being tied down to a bank loan or financier when he started the business, but it did restrict the kind of property he was able to acquire.

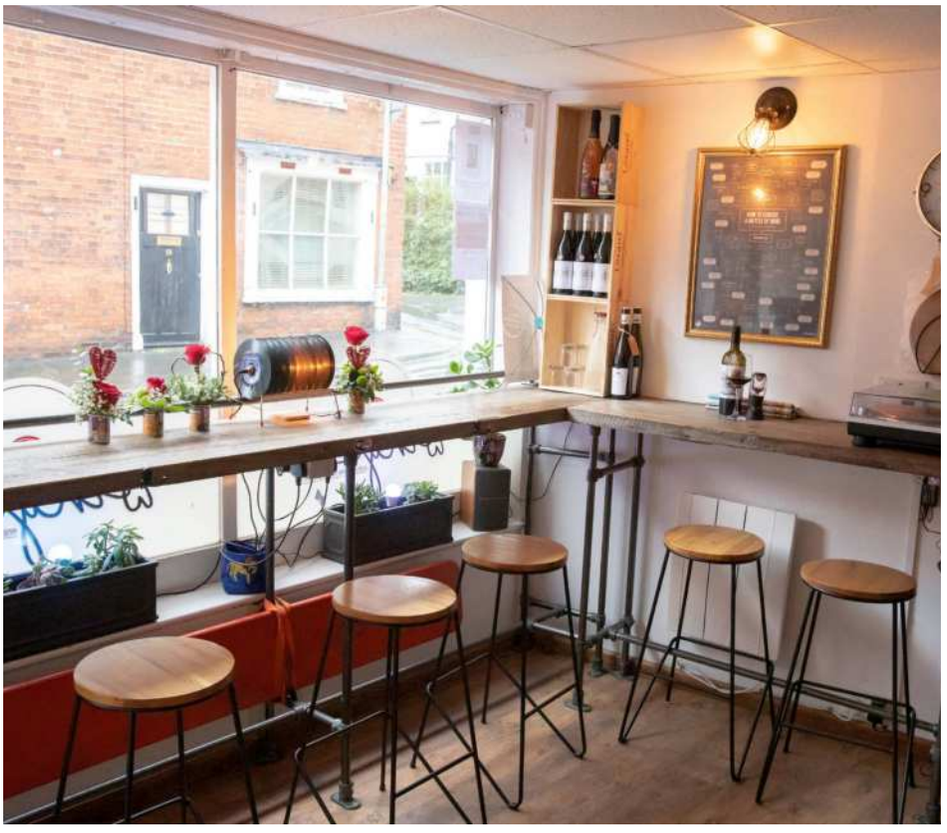
"When I first set this up, I would have liked to have a bigger shop," he admits, "but it has worked out perfectly; it is not a big space, but it feels very intimate, and has become a real community hub."

The store may be small, but it is big on comfort. With a choice of wine and beer

winyl
www.winyl.co.uk
OPENING TIMES
HOTBOX
winyl
winyl

new vinyl
B

OLD TRU ZIN
SOMEWHERE ELSE
LA MALDITA
Laffitte
CHAVAL
planetbee
Laffitte



that can be taken away or consumed on the premises, a decent sound system to try out records and no shortage of seating, it's not easy to drag yourself away. Customers are encouraged to browse the records or just sit back, relax and have a drink. Ideally both. The welcoming atmosphere means people tend to linger, and Tattam admits enjoying a few glasses of wine or beer does tend to help open people's wallets.

"Spending £20 on a record doesn't seem that expensive, especially after buying a bottle of wine. We make sure the records are well protected and allow people to take drinks wherever they like in the store," he says.

Winyl's broad appeal means it is not unusual to see three generations of the same family.

> **It was our first Record Store Day last year. I had my doubts, but it was huge**

"We see a massive range of demographics and are dog-friendly. We don't get an average customer; people who know their wine will come in and investigate, while others head straight for the vinyl.

"Something I hear over and over again from the older customers is that they are re-buying records they sold years ago."

Launched shortly after Record Store Day last year, Winyl's songwriting circle has proven very popular with local musicians, too. The aim is for participants to come in to the shop with a clean sheet and, collectively, write a brand new song within the two-hour timeframe.

A drummer himself, Tattam will often join in on the store's cajón box drum if it's not being used by a customer, while an acoustic guitar is also on hand. "We record it live at the end of the session and put it up on Instagram and Facebook," he explains. "We have two regular musicians, and one of them has a recording studio that we have used to record two songs so far. The aim is to record an album's worth of songs in the studio and release an LP later this year."

Tattam made several useful contacts while booking bands to play at Winyl on Record Store Day last year, and since then the shop has regularly played host to shows by local acts.

"It was our first Record Store Day last year," he says. "Someone had told me that Record Store Day isn't worth it because it is a lot of investment, so I had my doubts, but it was huge. We did get stuck with around 100 records

PERFECT PAIRINGS

STEVE'S LANDMARK RECORDS AND WINES TO ENJOY THEM WITH

THE POLICE
OUTLANDOS D'AMOUR
"The first album I bought and the band that made me want to play drums. It has the best opening three tracks of almost any LP; *Next To You, So Lonely* and *Roxanne*. Then Side Two opens with *Can't Stand Losing You*. I studied the back cover collage art and even sought out the Police button badge to proudly wear on my school blazer. With a penchant for French album titles, the 'outlaws of love' could only be paired with our only French wine so far – a fresh, dry, crisp (like Stewart Copeland's drum sound) Rosé, St Felix, a blend of Grenache and Cinsault.

ARCTIC MONKEYS
WHATEVER PEOPLE SAY I AM, THAT'S WHAT I'M NOT
"The first band I noticed using MP3 torrents to reach a new audience, and the point when I realised that the physical music format was in A&E. I downloaded the demos and went to an early gig at The Waterfront, Norwich, where everyone knew the words before a single had been released. On the list of all-time great debut albums, it sells at least once a month from Winyl. I'd pair it with a chilled Chardonnay. We have Genevieve, a nice oaked example. This wine gives a nice grapefruit tang to start before coating the mouth with buttery flavour and a touch of oak. Complex and matures nicely, like the Arctic Monkeys themselves."

BAT FOR LASHES
LOST GIRLS
"My album of 2019 on lovely sunrise splatter vinyl. It has distant echoes of The Cure, notably on *Vampires*, and synth-drenched songs that remind me of Cliff Martinez's work on *Drive* overlaid with Natasha Khan's soft and soothing vocals. Often a late-night album choice of mine, with a glass of smoky Aussie Shiraz, like our Silent Noise from Charlie O' Brien in Adelaide: he's a young gun in wine, and a very cool music lover."

afterwards, that have been very hard to shift, and there is a lot of set-up and a lot of cost involved, but the day itself was incredible."

Tattam arrived on Record Store Day 2019 at 6am, two hours before the store was due to open, to find a long queue of eager customers stretching around the corner.

He says: "We gave out free hot drinks and rolls, and ran a ticket entry system so the shop didn't feel crowded. The aim was to make it a pleasant experience, not too crowded inside, and reward the people who got here first.

"There was a great atmosphere and people came out of the woodwork who had probably been saving all year for Record Store Day. We had a lot of first-time customers, who have since turned into regulars."

RANGE AND DEPTH

Winyl's vinyl is presented in attractive reclaimed wood and upcycled scaffolding racks, and Tattam's focus on eco-friendly materials means there is not a plastic cup or straw to be seen.

The range of records consists primarily of new releases and classic album reissues, with a limited selection of second-hand titles also available. Albums are priced from £2 upwards, but the vast majority are between £10 and £12.

"Someone looking for an original pressing may find it, but it is mostly reasonably priced playable stock; classic records from the 1960s, 70s and 80s, when vinyl was at its peak and there were still good-quality pressings," says Tattam.

Winyl's selection of new-release stock is broad, too, but Tattam says the focus is primarily on indie and rock albums.

"The biggest-selling album for us last year was Nick Cave's *Ghosteen*, but we have a smattering of everything, it is a very eclectic range. We stock the classic catalogue, a selection of dance and ambient electronica such as Floating Points, and we have boxes of jazz, country, blues and reggae LPs.

"A good number of customers order things in, usually leftfield indie releases. For instance, Stereolab's catalogue is being reissued on clear vinyl and that is selling really well."

Despite his decades in music retail, including numerous store manager roles at Virgin, Tattam admits to being prone to getting carried away when ordering stock.

"As a vinyl fan who runs a record store, when I am looking through these lists of all the great releases, I do get carried away and over order, which means I run out of space. It's a matter of trying to make the small space work," he says.

While Winyl does have a website that catalogues the shop's records and wine, Tattam says it is used primarily to encourage people into the store rather than to sell vinyl. To encourage loyalty, Winyl offers a price-match guarantee. "I was shocked by how much HMV in Colchester were charging for vinyl," he says. "I think it is really important to be reasonably priced, I don't need to rip people off, I want them to be satisfied with the price and the whole experience."

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COUNTER CULTURE

The line between cool and uncool has been eroded. **Del Day** watches in confusion as waves of hipsters make for Union's Heaven 17 section

As someone who, over two decades on, still considers himself fighting the Indie Wars of the late 80s, like some lost Vietnam vet unable to accept the battle is over, the very notion I'd be listening to the likes of Abba, The Carpenters, Hall & Oates, bleeding Bon Jovi, even, let alone selling them in our shop, would have had me shaking in my desert boots.

For someone like me who purchased all their albums in the enchantingly cool Camden Town vinyl enclaves, these 'things' were as alien as, well, aliens. Yet, over the last 18 months the number of copies of *American Pie*, *Hotel California* and *Graceland* we have lovingly bagged up for satisfied customers would truly amaze even the most ardent sceptic. Who knew? Well, most of you I guess.

I can't say it's been easy, I must be honest. Even now, I recoil when that student pushes *No Jacket Required* under my nose, but it's getting easier. It has always been the case that these records have been evergreens in any shop – just not any I spent my youth in. There has definitely been a shift somewhere along the line in the perception of such artefacts.

I'd argue there are two reasons. The first, hipsters. In all their many facets, these sages of the subculture have played a kingmaker role for a while. However, clinical in the way they decipher which albums get to be cool while others are left to languish alongside Dan Fogelberg and Enya, hipsters hold the key of a band's kudos aloft like some huge ironic chalice that only the knowing can sup from. Those safe indie heartlands are now infested with the likes of Joan Armatrading and Fleetwood Mac, once unstylish behemoths now free to roam unabated.

I'm pretty sure I despised this stuff. And now, despite seeing many a friend fall by the wayside clutching that over-played Jazz Butcher 12-inch like aural rosary in the aftermath of defeat, I quite like some of it. Well, it sells for a start, whereas those killer Six By Seven RSD releases are still gathering dust on the shelves awaiting the middle-aged indie dads to save them. It hasn't really happened for Doves, so I don't hold out much hope for Nottingham's finest.

Among all the success stories making silk purses that are actually championed in some quarters as sow's ears, there still remain those albums that just can't seem to get a break when it comes to the fate of fashion. I'm thinking Emerson, Lake And Palmer here folks, a name that conjures fear in even the most forgiving of minds. Here is a band that not even the most sardonic of hip sonic sages could purport to like, surely? Well, step forward one such sooth, when entering the shop one bright sunny morn to be met with what sounded like some kind of late Miles Davis fusion freak-out. Wow, what the hell is this? Sounds killer. Dan, Union's unabashed progonaut, took great pleasure in yelling, "ELP… MAN… *TARKUS*!" Jesus, what the hell is happening to me?

Ever since taking on the shop, it's become obvious the clearly marked 'cool/non cool' divide of old is there to be stepped across, a mere indent in the sand. It wasn't like that in my day. There were stricter rules deciding what I could buy and what I couldn't touch with a bargepole. Or, maybe in all that youthful posing and fervent brow furrowing I had just restricted myself from pleasures and unwanted advances? My own notions of cool holding back my musically feverish mind? Who knows? These days, we have kids in buying Heaven 17 records without an ounce of shame. A nod from Richard Hawley and Bobby Darin enjoys 6 Music adulation and way more attention than The Railway Children ever did. It's time for me to accept the war is well and truly over. ●

We have kids in here buying Heaven 17 albums without an ounce of shame

Del Day is the co-owner of Union Music Store in Lewes, Sussex. He has been buying and collecting vinyl since the early 80s

PUNK 45s

You may not find cash in your attic, but there might be some valuable vinyl sitting on your shelves. **Gary Tipp** runs the rule over a bunch of snotty 7"s

The Damned are a regular target for punk collectors

"PICTURE SLEEVES ARE EVERYTHING WHEN IT COMES TO PUNK 45s"

Certain genres suit certain formats. Prog has the album, preferably a double, dance lays claim to the 12" single, while punk will always have the 7", with a picture sleeve a necessity. Dickie Spurgin, of Harbour Records in Emsworth, explains: "Our punk 45s are popular with 'a certain demographic' and if word gets out that a collection has come, in we have a large group of regulars who will come into the shop that week. The limited supply is accompanied by a select group of old punks, who create a specialised demand. Therefore, market forces keep the prices healthy. The entry point is around £5 for a popular picture sleeve version of a *TOTP* pop-punk anthem, and around £10-£20 for rarer issues, but you have to know your product, and collectable singles are individually valued. Picture sleeves are everything when it comes to punk 45s.

"The Clash, Siouxsie, Buzzcocks, The Undertones, The Damned and Ramones are obvious sellers and Stiff Little Fingers, almost exclusively on picture sleeves, but early Adam And The Ants, Chelsea, Generation X and X-Ray Spex are all represented. From memory, the best price for a single was around £100 for a copy of The Damned's *Stretcher Case*."

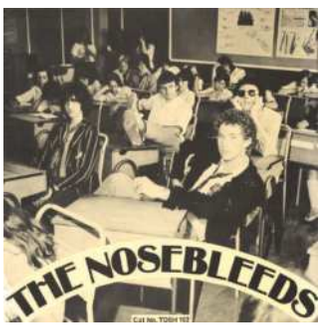
For our sliding-scale selection of punk 45s, we've looked at UK pressings, and for the most part we have used the Discogs Median price.

MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY

RARE

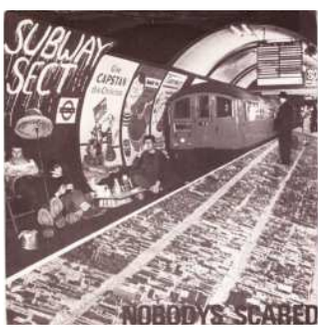
£20
SLAUGHTER & THE DOGS
CRANKED UP REALLY HIGH
RABID (TOSH 101)
Slaughter & The Dogs supported the Sex Pistols at the Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall in July 1976 – so the band's punk credentials can't be faulted. Their raucous debut single was released on indie label Rabid.

£25
DEAD BOYS
SONIC REDUCER
SIRE (SRE 1004)
Taken from the album *Young Loud And Snotty*, the sneering US punks' most vital moment on vinyl was released on 45 by Sire in the UK in 1977. It was issued without a picture sleeve – so if you've got one, it's a fake.



£25
THE NOSEBLEEDS
AIN'T BIN TO NO
MUSIC SCHOOL
RABID (TOSH 102)
Featuring The Durutti Column's Vini Reilly on guitar, The Nosebleeds only managed to stay together long enough to release one single. Backed by *Fascist Pigs*, it was the sole fruit of their wasted labour.

£25
THE SAINTS
(I'M) STRANDED
POWER EXCHANGE (PX 242)
The Saints launched *(I'm) Stranded* on Fatal Records in Australia in September 1976 (Discogs Median £695). The proto-punk anthem was picked up and released by Power Exchange in the UK a few months later.

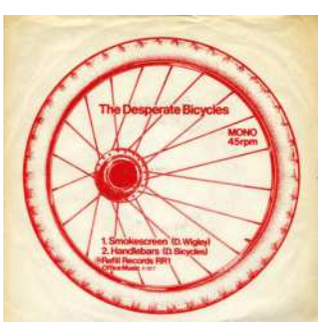


£25
SUBWAY SECT
NOBODYS SCARED
BRAIK (BRS 01)
Although part of its first wave, Subway Sect always seemed utterly disdainful of the punk-rock movement. The band's debut single is the only release on Bernie Rhodes' short-lived Braik Records label.

£35
JOHNNY AND THE SELF ABUSERS
SAINTS AND SINNERS
CHISWICK (NS22)
With Simple Minds' Jim Kerr among their ranks, known then as Pripton Weird, the priapic six-piece punk outfit from Glasgow only managed a solitary 7" during their brief eight-month existence.

£35
X-RAY SPEX
OH BONDAGE UP YOURS!
VIRGIN (VS 189)
Worth it for the spoken intro ("Some say little girls should be seen and not heard, but I think… Oh Bondage Up Yours! 1-2-3-4"), Poly Styrene was one of punk's original voices. Her band's debut single is an artefact of rare beauty.

£35
THE ADVERTS
ONE CHORD WONDERS
STIFF (BUY 13)
This self-deprecating 45 was The Adverts' only release on the punk-savvy Stiff label. The Barney Bubbles-designed sleeve featuring a close-in crop of bass player Gaye Advert only adds to its desirability among punk collectors.



£40
THE DESPERATE BICYCLES
SMOKESCREEN/HANDLEBARS
REFILL (RR1)
The Desperate Bicycles formed in March 1977 specifically for the purpose of recording and releasing a single on their own label. The DIY 45 was cut with both tracks on each side, as it was cheaper that way.

£50/£60
BUZZCOCKS
SPIRAL SCRATCH
NEW HORMONES (ORG1)
Buzzcocks' self-financed *Spiral Scratch* EP has been reissued many times. The original New Hormones release is the version with the price tag. Look for picture sleeves without 'with HOWARD DEVOTO' under the band name.

RARER

£60
WIRE
MANNEQUIN
HARVEST (HAR 5144)
A precursor to their debut, the first 10,000 copies of Wire's scathing debut 45 were released in a limited edition picture sleeve. After that, you had to make do with a generic Harvest one. It is backed with early classics *Feeling Called Love* and *12XU*.

£70
THE SNIVELLING SHITS
TERMINAL STUPID/
I CAN'T COME
GHETTO ROCKERS (PRE 2)
Music journo Giovanni Dadomo's band may have been a joke, but this AA side is as glorious as a parody has the right to be. If you've got the limited first press (500) on paper labels, you're laughing.

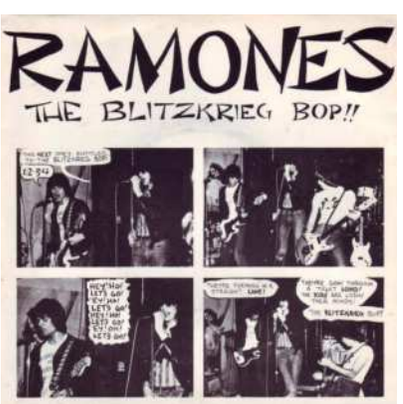
£80
THE DAMNED
NEW ROSE
STIFF (BUY 6)
Widely seen as the first UK punk single, a first press is a slice of music history. The original 7" had a push-out centre and a 'Delga' credit on the back of the picture sleeve. The band's limited edition *Stretcher Case Baby* (DAMNED 1) single can fetch in excess of £120.

£100
THE CLASH
CAPITAL RADIO EP
CBS (CL1)
The fabled *Capital Radio* EP was a promo given away to early adopter fans who could be bothered to send off a coupon printed in *NME*, together with a red sticker found on the inside of the cover of the first 10,000 copies of the band's self-titled debut.

£140
SEX PISTOLS
ANARCHY IN THE UK
EMI (EMI 2566)
You can spend a fortune on any number of *Anarchy* acetates or test pressings, but it's the version that made it into the shops that concerns us here. Even then there's a rarity factor – as initial presses wrongly give Chris Thomas a production credit on the B-side.

£180
STIFF LITTLE FINGERS
SUSPECT DEVICE
RIGID DIGITS (SRD-1)
Named after a Vibrators song, Stiff Little Fingers were formed in Belfast at the height of the Troubles. 500 copies of the explosive debut were released on the band's own label in March 1978, before being reissued by Rough Trade later that year.

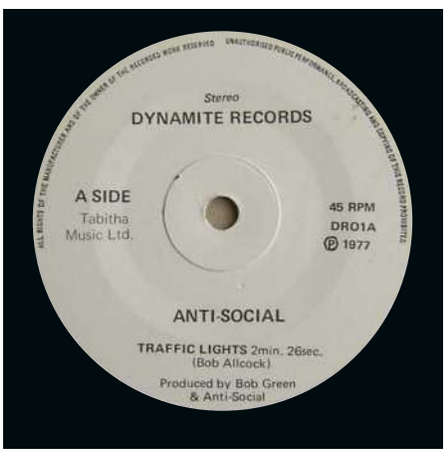
£195
RUTS
IN A RUT
PEOPLE UNITE (SJP 795)
The Ruts' blistering first single was finally released on People Unite in January 1979. The first press with the black-ringed label was limited to 1,000 copies and commands the money, rather than the repress (RUT 1). It was backed with anti-heroin tirade *H-Eyes*.



£250
RAMONES
BLITZKRIEG BOP
SIRE (6078 601)
The Ramones were a huge influence on British punks, with their show at the Roundhouse on 4 July 1976 pivotal in the movement's development. *Blitzkrieg Bop* was released a month earlier, and it's the ultra-rare cartoon-style sleeve that piles on the value.

RAREST

£2,000
BLONDIE
X OFFENDER
PRIVATE STOCK (PVT 90)
The title of this early Blondie single was originally *Sex Offender* and was written by bassist Gary Valentine about an 18-year-old boy being arrested for having sex with his younger girlfriend. Debbie Harry stepped in and tweaked the lyrics so that the track was about a prostitute being attracted to the police officer who had arrested her. Record label Private Stock pressed the single during the summer of 1976, but it was to remain unissued. The track later resurfaced as the B-side of the *Rip Her To Shreds* 45 on Chrysalis, but with a different mix – explaining the rarity factor.



£1,500
ANTI-SOCIAL
TRAFFIC LIGHTS
DYNAMITE (DR01)
Brummie punks Anti-Social formed in 1977 out of the ashes of previous band Maniac and released just the one single. Released on Dynamite Records, it was included in John Peel's legendary Record Box and has (somehow) earned itself the status of one of punk's rarest 45s. This scarcity led to a number of bootlegs flooding the market, although, reportedly, the fakes have the wrong year of release on them. The band became famous by offering £15,000 for someone to commit suicide onstage during a gig. Nobody took up the offer, but the DPP were not amused by the sheer inanity of the stunt.

£15,000
SEX PISTOLS
GOD SAVE THE QUEEN
A&M (AMS 7284)
The Sex Pistols were released from their contract by EMI after the band's four-letter tirade on Bill Grundy's *Today* programme, and subsequently signed by A&M. The label pressed 25,000 copies of this, but most were destroyed when ties were cut after another bout of anti-social behaviour. The story goes that A&M stored nine copies in a vault and gave a few to employees when the London office closed in 1998. Housed in an A&M paper sleeve, genuine originals have the serrated anti-slip necklace and '7284' written twice on the B-side runout. An unplayed copy has sold for a spectacular £15,590. ●

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY

Colombia

Known as the 'land of a thousand rhythms', **Russ Slater** samples some Colombian grooves

Colombia has never given its own music enough respect. Historically, the sounds of the coasts and the 60s-70s counter-culture were looked down upon by the elite, who preferred jazz, classical and more erudite styles, while institutional racism can't be ignored either, as so much Afro-Colombian music has been, and still is, under-appreciated.

It's this 'inferior' music that is now so loved by collectors, with danceable, tropical grooves at the heart of their affections, as well as a small collective of rock bands that sprung up at the end of the 60s. Inspired by the British Invasion and US rock 'n' roll, groups such as The Speakers, Los Flippers and Los Yetis emerged, playing covers of their favourite tunes before later writing their own originals. With primitive equipment, these records still have an irresistible raw power, enthusiasm and inventiveness. The work of all of these bands, as well as Los Ampex and Los Streaks, is highly collectible, but special mention must be made of The Speakers' final album *En el Maravilloso Mundo de Ingesón* (1968), a work of *Sgt. Pepper*-aping psychedelic pop transcendence; Los Yetis' *Olvidate* (1968), whose slow blues bites like a feral The Animals; and the fuzz-tastic *Discotheque* by The Flipper's (1966), all costing £300-500 for a quality copy, while *The Walflower Complextion* (1967), an album made by US ex-pats in Colombia, often goes for closer to £600.

Following that crop, Génesis, Columna de Fuego and Siglo Cero came along in the early 70s, making increasingly esoteric and experimental works. Siglo Cero's only album, *Latinoamérica*, from 1970, contains just one track (split into two parts), a rock/pseudo-jazz jam, and regularly goes for £100-300. While these bands were firmly part of the counter-culture, there were also some pop acts whose sound veered into woozy, hypnotic territory, such as the two collectible albums that singing sisters Elia y Elizabeth made in 1973, and a 7" single of *Love Story* (1969) by Ana y Jaime, which will cost up to £400.

While it's possible to count Colombia's well-known rock bands on two hands, the same can't be said of the music that emanated from the coast, with cumbia, salsa and other tropical styles the country's go-to sounds. Digging for treasure amongst this lot is tricky, but there are some gems out there. The big prices are paid for albums containing rare grooves, primed for the dancefloor, with Lisandro Meza's *Salsita Mami* (1970), Los Corales del Caribe's *Asi Es Valledupar* (1971) and Cresencio Camacho Con El Super Combo Curro's *Monicongo Prieto*, a wild sax and bass-heavy salsa LP, all prime examples that have sold for close to £500. Los Chicos Malos' two 1980 albums are also much coveted, as is Phirpo Y Sus Caribes' *Parrilla Caliente* (1972), a fine blend of Afro funk and Latin psych.

These records have an irresistible raw power and inventiveness

Both Lisandro Meza and Los Chicos Malos came out on Discos Fuentes, one of the country's most prominent labels (and whose *14 Cañonazos Bailables* series of dance hits, released every Christmas since 1961, is an institution, and inexpensive starting point for discovering Colombian tropical music). Other labels to keep an eye out for include Costeño, Caliente and Felito, three labels from the coast that are much rarer and contain some killer, raw grooves.

And it's this 'original' coastal sound, with a stronger Afro-Colombian identity, which will become more coveted in coming years, with LPs by Wganda Kenya, Abelardo Carbonó, Cumbia Siglo XX and compilations such as *Ritmo Africano* (1979) on Machuca all worth looking out for. Albums by fiery accordion great Aníbal Velásquez, Pedro Beltrán's many cumbia combos and the sax mastery of Michi Sarmiento are others to keep an eye on.

To finish off, I must mention two opposing ends of the Colombian vinyl spectrum, with big prices being paid for Shakira's first two albums. *Magia* (1991) and *Peligro* (1993), back when she was a bit 'rock', regularly fetch up to £500. And for death metal, records by Parabellum, Mayhem, Reencarnación and Nebiros go for crazy prices. Parabellum's two 12" releases regularly fetch £1,000+, reflecting the fact that Colombia had, and still has today, a cherished metal scene.

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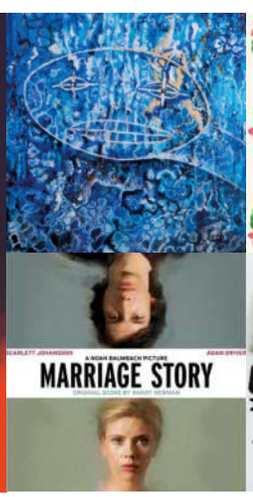
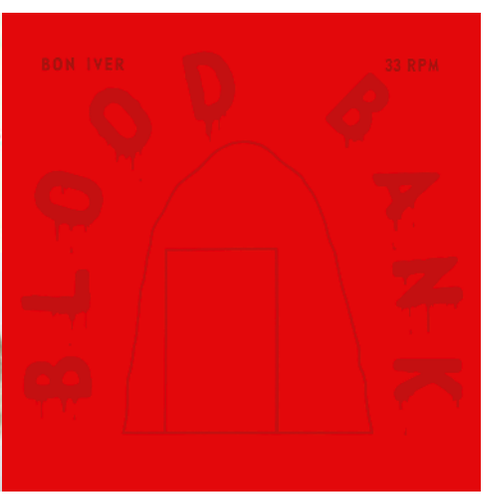




Johnny Cash

THE COMPLETE MERCURY ALBUMS 1986-1991/
EASY RIDER: THE BEST OF THE MERCURY RECORDINGS
MERCURY/UMC

After almost 30 years on Columbia Records, country music legend Johnny Cash released his first album on Mercury Records. As **John Earls** witnesses, it wasn't always a marriage made in heaven

WHAT'S INSIDE

THE COMPLETE MERCURY ALBUMS
LP1 Carl Perkins/Jerry Lee Lewis/Roy Orbison/Johnny Cash Class Of '55 Memphis Rock & Roll Homecoming
LP2 Johnny Cash Is Coming To Town (1987)
LP3 Water From The Wells Of Home (1988)
LPs4&5 Classic Cash, Hall Of Fame Series (1988)
LP6 Boom Chicka Boom (1990)
LP7 The Mystery Of Life (1991)

EASY RIDER – THE BEST OF THE MERCURY RECORDINGS 2LPs

Outside of Elton John, Neil Diamond and Rod Stewart, few respected artists' records are found in charity shops more frequently than Johnny Cash's. Yet you rarely see copies of the six albums Cash made for Mercury. Untouched since their initial release, it's as if the wilderness years before *American Recordings* in 1994 didn't happen.

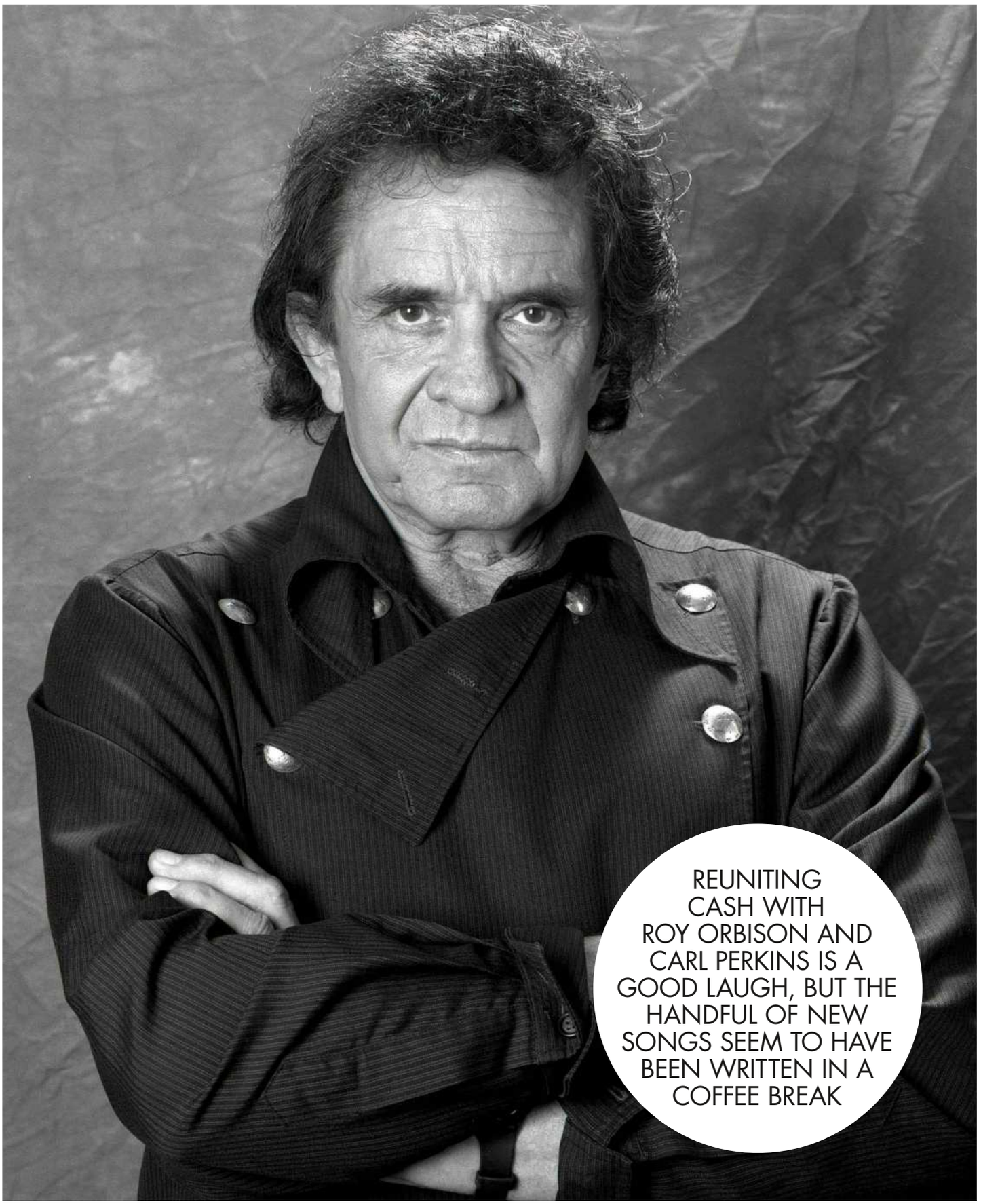
Finally reissued and remastered at Universal's Nashville studio by veteran engineer Kevin Reeves, the albums are compiled into a reasonably packaged boxset, and also available separately on 180g vinyl. One instant gripe: the series' CDs have bonus tracks that aren't available on vinyl, though the more haunting, sparser demos for the CD of *Classic Cash: Hall Of Fame Series* were released separately as the *Early Mixes* album for Record Store Day.

Now nearly 30 years have gone by since Cash's last Mercury album, *The Mystery Of Life*, does his lost work deserve reassessing? At times, yes. You'd struggle to make a case for any individual album to rank alongside Cash's best work. But, as the simultaneously released 24-song Mercury compilation *Easy Rider* shows, there are some fine moments. Having left Columbia after over 30 years, Cash drifted onto Mercury, rather than arriving with any fresh creative drive. This was made explicit on his first album for the label, *Class Of '55: Memphis Rock & Roll Homecoming*. Reuniting Cash with fellow Sun graduates Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis, it's a good laugh, but the handful of new songs seem written in a coffee break – the highlight is a rollicking take on John Fogerty's *Big Train (From Memphis)*.

The pick of the set follows, with 1987's *Johnny Cash Is Coming To Town* a whirlwind rockabilly featuring The Carter Family and Waylon Jennings. It's an angry, defiant record, with *I'd Rather Have You* one of Cash's best self-penned songs and his reading of Elvis Costello's *The Big Light* a fiery precursor to *American Recordings*. Conversely, motoring anthem *Heavy Metal (Don't Mean Rock And Roll To Me)* is the kind of clunky comedy people have in mind when they dismiss Cash's 80s. This applies to most of the subsequent album, *Water From The Wells Of Home*, which features so many guests it's hard to make Cash himself out. Every song is a duet. *New Moon Over Jamaica* is a risible dud from Paul McCartney; *As Long As I Live* a rare misfire with Emmylou Harris. The *Hall Of Fame Series* is actually worse, Cash revisiting his old songs seemingly as a contractual obligation – go for the Record Store Day version instead.

A new decade saw Cash interested again, cutting down on the guests for the reflective *Boom Chicka Boom*. It's a little too cosy at times (and the sleeve is a total horror), but *Farmer's Almanac* is Cash's best whimsy. Rounding off the box, by *The Mystery Of Life* neither Cash nor Mercury could be bothered with each other. It's not pretty.

6



REUNITING CASH WITH ROY ORBISON AND CARL PERKINS IS A GOOD LAUGH, BUT THE HANDFUL OF NEW SONGS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN A COFFEE BREAK

ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Cocteau Twins

GARLANDS/VICTORIALAND

4AD

The last two of the Cocteau Twins' albums to be reissued on vinyl are anomalies. *Garlands*, their first, was the only one to feature bassist Will Heggie, while their fourth, 1986's *Victorialand*, found Liz Fraser and Robin Guthrie working without his replacement, multi-instrumentalist Simon Raymonde, who was busy with label boss Ivo Watts-Russell's This Mortal Coil collective. Their 1982 debut finds them in an embryonic state, though Fraser clearly already has the "Stars in my eyes/ Stars in my face" – as *Shallow Then Halo* puts it – that would become associated with her extraordinary, ethereal vocal. Admittedly, she sounds surprisingly conventional on *But I'm Not* and almost folkish on *The Hollow Men*, but there's no denying her inventiveness on *Wax And Wane* or amid *Blind Dumb Deaf*'s chiming guitars and rigorous drum machine rhythms. Beauty's hard won, however: the trio's admiration for The Cure and Siouxsie And The Banshees is explicit, Heggie's basslines bobbing and weaving through a claustrophobic, post-punk landscape, while Guthrie's guitars are frequently as nasty as Sonic Youth's, especially on the title track. On the other hand, with dissonance substituted by spangled pianos and shimmering guitars, and drums almost absent, *Victorialand* was full of so much space and beauty it was almost ambient. *Lazy Calm* rose like an Arctic sun, while Fraser's voice danced deftly around *Fluffy Tufts*' arpeggios and tripped lightly over the delightful *Oomingmak*. Even more apprehensive tunes, like *The Dark Months Of April And May* and *Feet-like Fins*, peaked optimistically. It remains the band's most spine-tingling collection. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

CHRIS GARNHAM THE PRINCE ESTATE/JAKE ARMOUR

Prince

THE RAINBOW CHILDREN/ONE NITE ALONE…LIVE!/
ONE NITE ALONE… THE AFTERSHOW/ONE NITE ALONE…

LEGACY/SONY

Two albums from the extremes of Prince's output get reissued in Legacy's seemingly random ordering of his post-Warner catalogue. 2001's *The Rainbow Children* is the nadir, an unlistenable honking freeform mess relieved only by the *Gett Off*-style funk of *The Work Part 1*, given away at the time on Napster. The sped-up subsonic voice of God should be kinda awe-inspiring, but is bleakly hilarious. For completists only, even if the free rainbow-coloured slipmat is gorgeous. The other studio album here, *One Nite Alone…*, ranks alongside *Musicology* as Prince's best of the decade. Where its predecessor was self-indulgent and overly busy, *One Nite Alone…* is mostly Prince alone at the piano, similar in its intimacy to the recently unearthed *Piano And A Microphone 1983*. The aching *U're Gonna C Me* is an overlooked classic, while a tender take on Joni Mitchell's *A Case Of You* is up with Prince's best covers. In between the studio releases came Prince's first official live albums. It's frustrating that *One Nite Alone…Live!* focuses on *The Rainbow Children*, as even Candy Dulfer, Maceo Parker and Sheila E can't turn those songs into gold, though given *Raspberry Beret* and *Strange Relationship* to mess around with, it's sometimes golden. Recorded during Prince's late-night post-show jamming sessions, *…The Aftershow* is tighter than its parent album – check out the sumptuous *Girls And Boys*. ***John Earls*** **7**

Sam Cooke
AIN'T THAT GOOD NEWS/
AT THE COPA/KEEP MOVIN' ON
ABKCO

Following January's excellently pressed release of Sam Cooke's first five albums come his final two, made on his own Tracey Records imprint before Cooke's grim death in 1964. *Ain't That Good News* features mighty protest song *A Change Is Gonna Come*, typical of the first side's soul power, before the classy ballads kick in on Side Two. Recorded in New York in July 1964, *At The Copa* demonstrates Cooke's command of an audience, switching from the smooth *Frankie And Johnny* to a persuasive *Blowin' In The Wind* recorded at the height of the civil rights struggle. Making its vinyl debut, 2002's *Keep Movin' On* compiles 23 songs from Cooke's Tracey years. It's superb in highlighting how Cooke was moving soul forward, rawer and more urgent than ever. What a loss he was. ***John Earls*** **8**

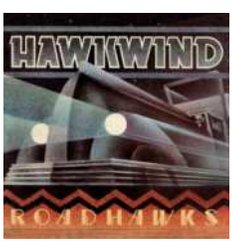
The Human League
OCTOPUS
RHINO

Closer in spirit to The Chemical Brothers and Underworld's mainstream emergence than anything to do with Britpop, The Human League's 1995 album revived them thanks to Top 10 classic *Tell Me When* and is their most straight-up floorfiller. A couple of ballads now appear flimsy, but are atoned for with the exhilarating *Filling Up With Heaven*, *These Are The Days* and stunning seven-minute finale *Cruel Young Lover*. The 2LP version (exclusive to Rhino's webstore) makes the dance music affiliation more explicit, adding eight remixes which have aged remarkably well. You'll remember how good Utah Saints were, thanks to their punishing version of *Tell Me When,* while Sonic Radiation's explosive *These Are The Days* will blast you into the middle of next week. Alongside 2011's *Credo*, here is the League's overlooked classic. ***John Earls*** **8**

The Fall
REFORMATION POST TLC
CHERRY RED

The latest release in Cherry Red's Fall Sound Archive series sees the tracklisting of the prolific outfit's 25th studio album stretched to occupy four sides of red splatter vinyl. Before you ask, the *TLC* in the title stands for 'traitors, liars and cunts', referring to the three members of the band who quit during the middle of a disastrous US tour the previous year. The emergency replacements went on to become permanent fixtures and were credited by MES, the very definition of an unreliable narrator, as an important factor in the band's late-period revitalisation. If you were to put the 25 in order, *Reformation* wouldn't trouble the Top 10, but it does have its qualities. While Smith's voice is all but shot, his prowess as the scribbler of amusingly obtuse lyrics remains intact, as does his unshakeable allegiance to the power of repetition. ***Gary Tipp*** **7**

Hawkwind
ROADHAWKS
ATOMHENGE

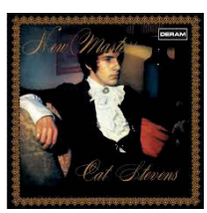


Looking good in its fully restored Barney Bubbles gatefold sleeve, this best of was first on the racks in 1976. Long since deleted, it brought together classic tracks from the band's first five albums and included a couple of timeless 45s in the form of *Urban Guerilla* and ancient school disco strobe classic *Silver Machine*. *Roadhawks* opens with the folk jangle of the lovely yet unrepresentative *Hurry On Sundown* before freaking out into the far reaches with *Space Is Deep (Doremi Fasol Latido)*, *Wind Of Change (Hall Of The Mountain Grill)* and *The Golden Void (Warrior On The Edge Of Time)*. A worthy intro to a great band, this compilation has been remastered from the original mastertapes and lovingly cut at Abbey Road. What's more, the package includes a faithful reproduction of the *Roadhawks* poster included with the first press. ***Gary Tipp*** **7**

Josef K
THE ONLY FUN IN TOWN
LES DISQUES DU CREPUSCULE

For a few heady months in 1980, Josef K looked set for bona fide rock stardom. This never quite happened, probably because a band that sounded like the missing link between early Orange Juice and Joy Division was never likely to mirror the breakout post-punk success of, say, Echo & The Bunnymen. Problems recording Josef K's debut LP for Postcard didn't help either, with one version of the record (latterly released as *Sorry For Laughing*) shelved as too polished and replaced by this offering, which singer Paul Haig later called "almost unlistenable". He's wrong. *The Only Fun In Town* is rough and ready, but the songs, notably the stately *It's Kinda Funny*, more than stand the test of time, as do the Peel Session tracks and singles included on a second disc. It's reissued on clear vinyl. ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Cat Stevens
MATTHEW & SON/NEW MASTERS
UMC

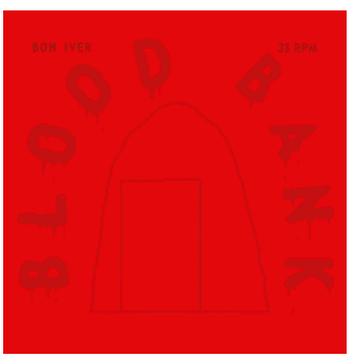


"Nothing looks weird, not even a beard…" sings the artist formerly known as Steven Demetre Georgiou on *Portobello Road*. Before he became a 1970s facial hair poster boy, Cat Stevens was a clean-shaven Tin Pan Alley singer-songwriter, managed by an ex-member of Dusty Springfield's first outfit. *Matthew & Son* contains some enduring pop tunes (don't miss undiscovered Northern Soul classic *Come On And Dance*), as does *New Masters*, which boasts the original *The First Cut Is The Deepest*. Both have been remastered at Abbey Road to "breathe new life" into them. This amounts to bringing Cat's vocals up over the orchestral backing and enhancing the bass – something worth hearing, as it's played by a pre-Led Zep John Paul Jones. ***Ben Wardle*** **7**

Bon Iver

BLOOD BANK

JAGJAGUWAR



Back in 2009, when the *Blood Bank* EP was first released, Justin Vernon was still known solely as a creator of smoky heartbreak Americana, the man who had retreated to the solitude of his family's hunting cabin when his life hit the buffers. Yet for those who listened past the melancholy lead track here, which wouldn't have seemed so out of place on break-up-cataloguing debut *For Emma, Forever Ago*, there were clues Vernon's music was changing. Of the four tracks on the original EP, *Woods* was at the time seen largely as a quirky oddity for its use of Auto-Tune vocals. With the supreme benefit of hindsight, it now emerges as a key song in Bon Iver's canon, the moment when he began to embrace R'n'B influences, to range beyond his alt-folk roots. Key to this journey was Kanye West, who invited Vernon to Hawaii, where the rapper was recording his fifth studio LP, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010). The duo worked extensively together and the single *Lost In The World* featured both Vernon on vocals and samples from *Woods*. Vernon was learning how to craft music that could fill arenas, yet without compromising his integrity. This welcome reissue adds live versions of the songs from 2018, which sound more expansive than their predecessors, yet lose none of the originals' charm, and sleeve notes claiming, not unreasonably, that *Woods* represents Vernon making "a new beginning entirely". One, you would guess, that has succeeded beyond anything he thought possible. ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Depeche Mode

VIOLATOR: THE 12" SINGLES

SONY

Since August 2018, Sony have been doing a solid job in releasing boxsets of Depeche Mode's 12" singles for each album. For the previous six LPs, the boxes have come two albums at a time. Given *Violator*'s four singles produced 10 12"s, it's only fair Depeche have waited a year since the *Black Celebration* and *Music For The Masses* boxsets for their 1990 masterpiece, if only to let fans save £140. Most of the remixes are by Depeche's de-facto in-house team of François Kevorkian, Daniel Miller and Flood, joined by The Orb, The Beloved's Jon Marsh and – on a trippy 15-minute dub excursion into *Enjoy The Silence* – a six-strong team including Adrian Sherwood and Bomb The Bass' future Depeche producer Tim Simenon. The other exception is The KLF, creating one of just three of their external remixes on their low-key Trancentral mix of *Policy Of Truth*. Marsh's euphoric house reworking of *World In My Eyes*, the brilliantly titled 'Mode To Joy Mix', is comfortably the best guest remix. With CD singles starting to take over by *Violator*, there wasn't room for everything, even across 10 singles: four of *Violator*'s six B-sides could do with their regular 7" versions, as engaging as Kevorkian's extended versions of *Dangerous* and *Happiest Girl* are. The remixes are reliable, as is the packaging, complete with etched vinyl for the third *Enjoy The Silence* 12". But a little more adventurousness in choosing who to overhaul the singles would have been welcome. ***John Earls*** **7**

Jonathan Richman And The Modern Lovers

JONATHAN RICHMAN AND THE MODERN LOVERS

MUSIC ON VINYL

As a bridge between the proto-punk *The Modern Lovers* and the Michael Rosen kid poetry of *Jonathan Sings!*, this works well. Released in 1976 on Beserkely, with label boss Matthew 'King' Kaufman producing, Richman's debut came out months before Kaufmann unleashed those 1972 punk demos and put *Roadrunner* on the map. This, though, is the real Richman: childlike, charming and rich in doo-wop vocal harmony. It's packed with his signature songs: from *Rocking Shopping Center*, the B-movie comedy of *Here Come The Martian Martians* and *Abominable Snowman In The Market* to the urban poetry of *Lonely Financial Zone*. It's also earthier and less whimsical than some of his later efforts. ***Ben Wardle*** **8**

Various Artists

SCORCHA!

TROJAN

Whatever happened to youth tribes? There were times when you may have got a kicking for having the wrong haircut, but at least it kept you on your toes. In 1967, while long locks and tie-dye were the order of the day in the States, over here the kids (OK, some of the kids) were getting their barnets cropped and squeezing their bony arses into Sta Prest jeans. Needless to say, they weren't listening to The Grateful Dead either. Taking their cue from the Windrush generation, the skins and suedes were dancing to ska and rocksteady 45s from Jamaica. This excellent boxset comprising of ten 7" scorching facsimilie singles from the era (1967-1973) is a pitch-perfect document of those times. Compiled by Paul 'Smiler' Anderson and Mark Baxter, it's the ideal companion to their definitive book on the original skinhead scene. ***Gary Tipp*** **9**

The Skatalites

THE SKATALITE!

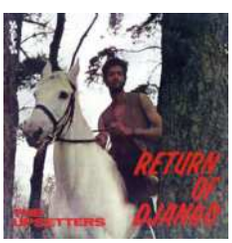
MUSIC ON VINYL

In a parallel universe, the jazz-trained musicians who emerged from Kingston's Alpha School For Boys in the early 60s would have been signed by Blue Note and had mythologising artwork designed by Reid Miles. Had this happened, then Tommy McCook and Roland Alphonso (tenor sax), Baba Brooks (trumpet), Jackie Mittoo (piano), Jerome Hinds (guitar), Lloyd Brevett (bass) and Lloyd Knibb (drums) would be the household names they deserve to be. As it is, the boys jobbed away on Coxsone Dodd's Studio One label as The Skatalites and occasionally their own names on Duke Reid's Treasure Isle. This wonderful collection is from the latter and is essential for any ska fan. Highlights include *Yard Broom*, *Dan-De-Lion* and *Eastern Standard Time*, all graced by Don Drummond's mournful trombone. ***Ben Wardle*** **9**

The Upsetters

RETURN OF DJANGO

MUSIC ON VINYL



Ska fans are paying upwards of £60 for a decent original Trojan copy of this classic 1969 Lee Perry release, so a 1,000-copy limited edition orange vinyl re-release is a no-brainer. Issued in the wake of the almost-Benny-Hill-theme title track's popularity, it's a compilation of Perry's best singles up to then, equally packed with floor fillers and curiosities. For every party banger, like *Drugs And Poison* and *Live Injection*, there's country twangin' geetar (*Medical Operation*) or beer bottle percussion (*One Punch*), anticipating the bananas excursions into dub outer space that Perry would make later in the 1970s. But despite its eclectic nature, the compilation holds together as a great party album – there's even the treat of hearing Perry's distinctive croak punctuating the rocksteady beat of *Eight For Eight* and *Ten To Twelve*. ***Ben Wardle*** **7**

Ranil Y Su Conjunto Tropical

RANIL Y SU CONJUNTO TROPICAL

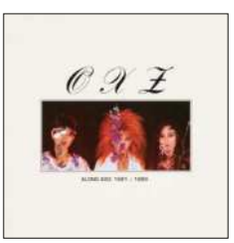
ANALOG AFRICA

Analog Africa pride themselves on going to the most far-flung places for their reissues, and this latest release is no exception. Ranil Y Su Conjunto Tropical were a hip-shaking combo who, in the 1970s, travelled up and down the Amazon from their base in Iquitos, Peru, playing for late-night revellers in need of shaking their thang. They also released a good few records along the way, which have been compiled here. Led by Ranil, their sound is as contorted as a jungle snake, with bright, ringing guitars, roving basslines and shuffling percussion that can tie you up in knots. Their rhythm of choice is the galloping cumbia beat, but there are waltzes and swooning slower numbers on here, bringing a sweat-soaked Amazonian fiesta of yesteryear to life. ***Russ Slater*** **7**

OXZ

ALONG AGO: 1981-1989

CAPTURED TRACKS

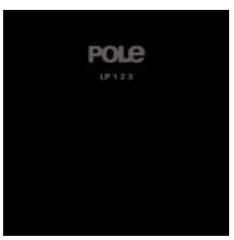


Another obscure 1980s post-punk band that you should've heard of? Well, yes, frankly. OXZ were a Japanese all-girl three-piece who existed during a time when there weren't many of those in Japan, let alone anywhere else. While Yellow Magic Orchestra were manufacturing streamlined electro-pop and Yumi Matsutoya soaked up the massive MOR audience, Hikko, Mika and Emiko were making engagingly amateurish punk pop: a spiky ESG with clattering drums, chanting choruses and rinky-dink guitars. Never releasing a complete album, the band put out several EPs, all of which, plus unreleased demos, are on this limited lavender release. Highlights include bass-led chant monsters *Vivian* and *Angel*, as well as the peculiar cut-and-shut *Along Ago*. Fans of the Au Pairs, Raincoats and, er UK Subs: get your skates on! ***Ben Wardle*** **7**

David Bowie
REALITY
FRIDAY MUSIC

Without wishing to sound ungrateful, the sheer volume of Bowie archive releases is getting overwhelming. There's a sense for some that this activity deflects attention from the back catalogue, especially the later albums, many of which deserve reappraisal. Which brings us to new coloured-vinyl 180g pressings of *Reality* (2003). Co-produced by Tony Visconti, *Reality* captures The Dame in his pre-hiatus neoclassical phase, when he appeared to be happy to sound like, well, David Bowie. It's one of his most underrated LPs, moving from playfulness on a skittering cover of *Pablo Picasso* to sombre, notably the fabulous *Bring Me The Disco King*, a melancholy, jazz-tinged meditation on the 70s that Bowie spent a decade getting right, and which clearly anticipates his last defiant artistic leap with *Blackstar.* ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Pole
POLE 1 2 3
MUTE



On a cursory listen, it would be easy to think the instrumental soundscapes of the first three albums by German electronic artist Pole, aka Stefan Betke, sound slight. Yet good luck to anyone who attempts to use these records, remastered and reissued for the first time on vinyl in nearly 20 years, as background music. In reality, they soon reveal themselves as far too insistent to be ignored, records that operate in a similar way to early dubstep releases, deliberately imbued with humanising pops and crackles – each a salute to the defective analogue Waldorf 4-Pole filter that gave Betke his stage-moniker. The tracks on *1* are the most accessible and melodic, but listen to the LPs back to back and you'll reach a kind of pulsing-bass-infused waking dream state. This release includes a bonus 12", *RAUM.* ***Jonathan Wright*** **7**

SOUNDTRACKS

Randy Newman
MARRIAGE STORY
LAKESHORE RECORDS

Watching Noah Baumbach's *Marriage Story* unfold, you might feel your heart strings being plucked to a familiar tune. That's the pull of composer Randy Newman, the man responsible for scoring nine Pixar films, and he's here to pull his signature moves on you. In the opening piece, *What I Love About Nicole*, Newman sets up a key motif of soft strings and a playful lilt of oboe that he then revisits throughout the score, each track tripping along with fairytale pacing. With a chamber orchestra providing an intimate sound parallel to the relationships on screen, Newman seamlessly laces melancholy into the tone of his otherwise innocent-sounding score. Some pieces verge into *Toy Story*-esque territory, but a childish touch is essential in bringing this exquisite film to life. ***Tilda Howard*** **7**

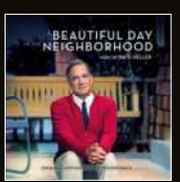
Warren Ellis
THIS TRAIN I RIDE
INVADA RECORDS

Arno Bitschy's stirring documentary tells the evocative stories of numerous women living transient lives, hopping America's freight trains. It was three years in the making for the French director, and Ellis, who scored *The Assassination Of Jesse James…* and *The Road*, had little hesitation in taking on the soundtrack. What's most remarkable is that Ellis composed most of the eight tracks with his Reface DX synth and laptop while on the Metro or Eurostar between sessions for Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds' *Ghosteen*. His subtly swirling ambient beds are interspersed with the voices of these remarkable women seeking freedom and identity on the open rails as America's infinitely beautiful landscapes scroll by. Prepare for extreme wanderlust. ***Gary Walker*** **8**

Don Davis
THE MATRIX
VARESE SARABANDE

Whip out your leather duster coats; the Keanussaince is officially in full swing with the reissue of *The Matrix* soundtrack album. From the opening off-key tinkle of a waterphone (surely the most 'red pill' of instruments) on *Main Title/Trinity Infinity* to the scurrying of strings on *Unable To Speak*, Don Davis' soundtrack is designed to put listeners on edge. For a film set in a digital world, the use of synths and computer soundscape sorcery is surprisingly minimal, the focus instead being placed on the barrage of horns, the dramatic clash of cymbals and the swell of violins. Though it's a picture disc, who doesn't want to spin a record splattered in green Matrix code? ***Tilda Howard*** **7**

Nate Heller
A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
MUSIC ON VINYL



Measuring up to the musical talent behind *Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood* must have seemed like a Herculean task to composer Nate Heller, but he's risen to the occasion with all the effortless charm in the world. Seamlessly blending the work of the show's original musical director, Johnny Costa, as interpolations throughout the soft score, Heller manages to honour the gentle American jazz the show was famed for while crafting new and delightful piano melodies that twinkle like Tom Hanks' eyes. Sprinkle in some acoustic offerings from Nick Drake and Cat Stevens for the sorrowful hero's journey scenes of the biopic and you've got yourself a winner. ***Tilda Howard*** **8**

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The Strokes

THE NEW ABNORMAL
CULT/COLUMBIA

After a prolonged hiatus, New York City fops The Strokes return with their first album for seven years. The break, as **John Earls** observes, has done them a world of good

TRACKLIST

1. The Adults Are Talking
2. Selfless
3. Brooklyn Bridge To Chorus
4. Bad Decisions
5. Eternal Summer
6. At The Door
7. Why Are Sundays So Depressing?
8. Not The Same Anymore
9. Ode To The Mets

Having arrived perfectly formed out of nowhere 19 years ago with *Is This It*, the expectations around The Strokes' new album are pretty much zero all over again. Previous albums *Angles* and *Comedown Machine* were, respectively, barely passable and worse than that. The band were hardly speaking and, at the few shows they played, it seemed they were only there for the cheque.

There have been signs The Strokes wanted to be The Strokes again. Their Hyde Park show in 2015 was good fun, not a word that had been associated with them in some time: you could sense what they'd been aiming to do on previously negligible songs such as *Welcome To Japan*. The following year's *Future Present Past* EP wasn't exactly stuffed with bangers, but at least sounded the work of a band acknowledging each other's existence.

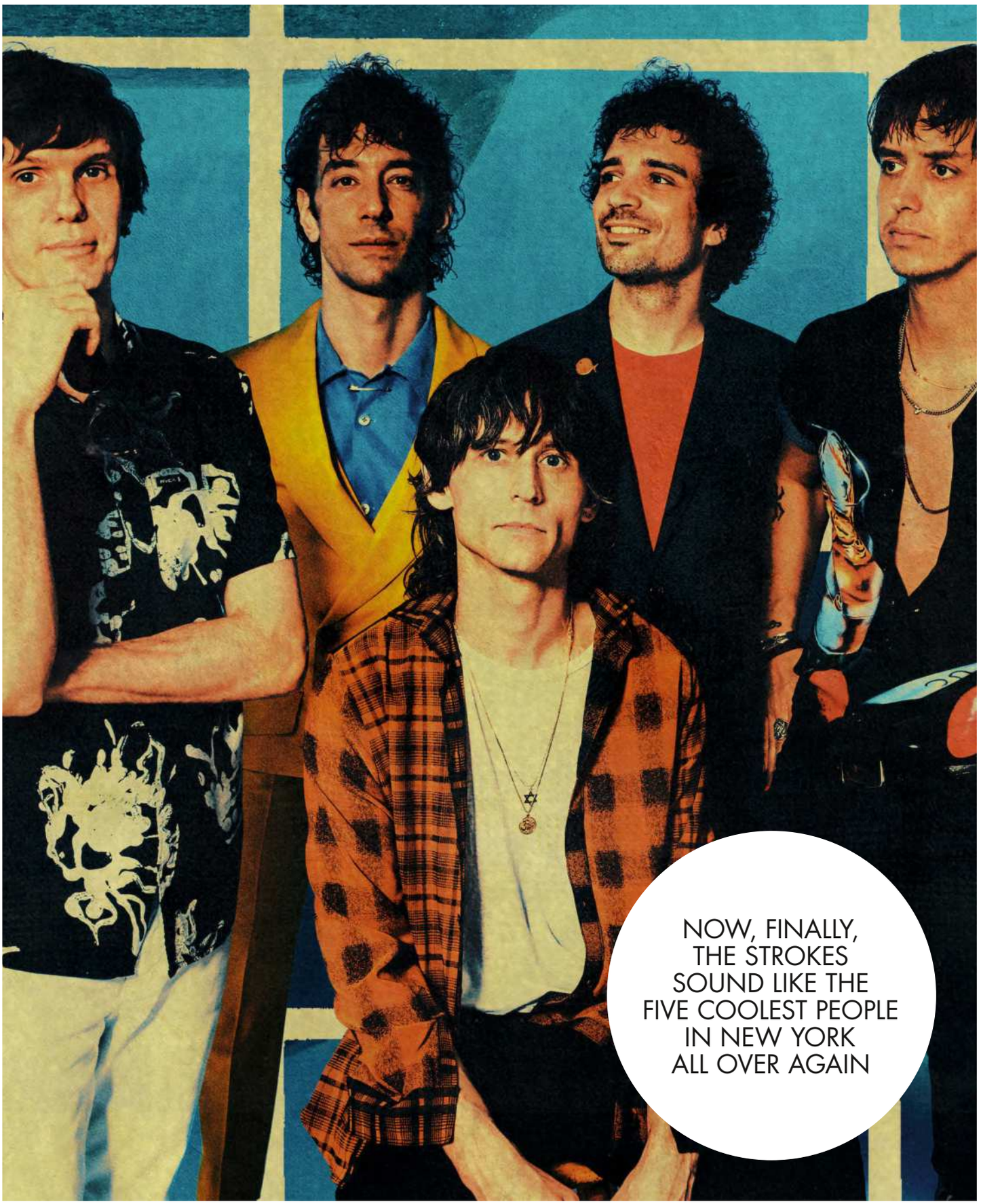
Now, finally, The Strokes sound like the five coolest people in New York all over again. They've musically matured. On *Is This It*, they wouldn't have been capable of a song as yearning and deep in regret as *Not The Same Anymore*, which is the sort of fully-realised stadium ballad The Strokes should have been making for at least a decade by now. If it's two minutes too long, *Eternal Summer* is similarly poised.

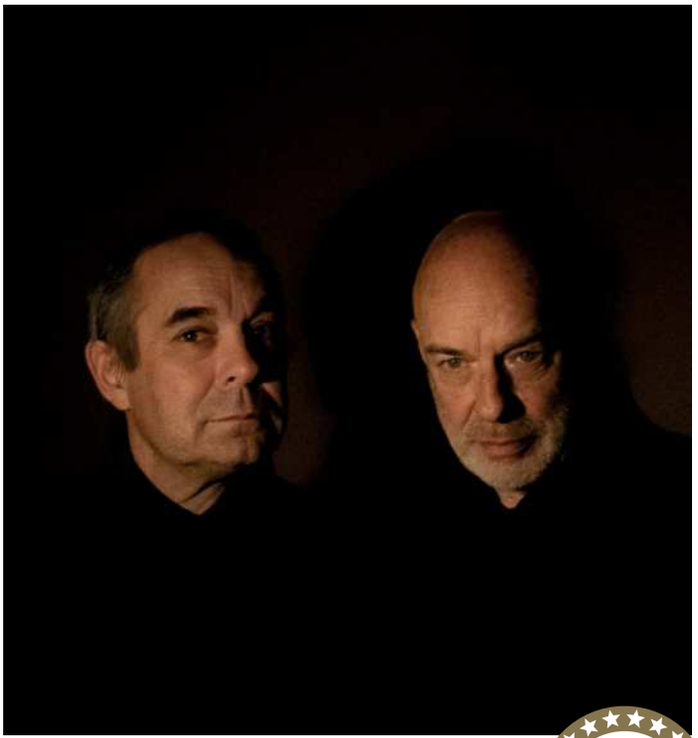
So, sure, The Strokes are all grown up and putting their differences aside. The really unexpected joy is that Hyde Park's sense of mischief is all over *The New Abnormal*, too. You'll know by now how *Bad Decisions* is a daft update of Billy Idol's *Dancing With Myself*. Just as ridiculous is *Brooklyn Bridge To Chorus*, which swaps Idol for The Bangles' back catalogue. Seemingly having exorcised his frustrations in The Voidz, Julian Casablancas' lyrics and vocals are playful, the band rallying behind him as ingenious as they ever were.

Rick Rubin does a great job producing, but this is less Johnny Cash-era sombre Rubin than the sonic prankster of Run-DMC and Beastie Boys: the literally barking riff of *Why Are Sundays So Depressing?* isn't something The Strokes have had so much fun with since at least *You Only Live Once*. There are 25 other ideas going on in the same song, yet Rubin keeps them all working together just fine. Not everything here is perfect. The dirge-like *At The Door* was a ropey choice of first single and drags the middle of the album down here. *Ode To The Mets* is a decent enough ballad, but is too earnest to deserve closing an album with so much energy.

Who knows if *The New Abnormal* proves to be a final hurrah or the momentum to propel The Strokes into a new creative odyssey. Does it even matter? After all, we've finally got The Strokes' first great album since *First Impressions Of Earth* 14 years ago. At last, audiences won't just be waiting for *Last Nite* and *NYC Cops* next time they're on tour. It's time to cheer for the new tunes in concert, too.

8


NOW, FINALLY,
THE STROKES
SOUND LIKE THE
FIVE COOLEST PEOPLE
IN NEW YORK
ALL OVER AGAIN



Roger Eno & Brian Eno

LONG LIVE VINYL EDITOR'S CHOICE

MIXING COLOURS

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

Astonishingly, the Eno brothers have never previously collaborated as a duo. Younger sibling Roger's first appearance on vinyl was on Brian's 1983's seminal *Apollo*, but there the brothers' work together was augmented by Daniel Lanois. Now, they're on their own. It's therefore a relief to report that *Mixing Colours* is very much what fans of either artist would hope for: stark, spacious and atmospheric settings from Brian using distinctive piano-led melodies from Roger. The project started, as Roger puts it, "as a back-and-forth conversation we were having over a 15-year period". Typically, Brian has conceptualised their work, comparing traditional instruments to islands and noting that electronics enable, "all the spaces in between those islands" to be explored, "yielding new sounds that have never previously existed." It would be easy to be cynical about this and point out that we've heard a keyboard shrouded in reverb before, but that would be churlish because this is a great album. Roger's yearning piano melodies are subtly given distinctive mood and space to breathe by Brian without distracting the listener with superfluous sonic experiments. The running order reads like a swatch list from Farrow & Ball, (*Deep Saffron*, *Rose Quartz*, *Desert Sand*) and all the tracks blend into an enormous landscape. Listen closely and themes emerge – *Spring Frost*, *Verdigris* and *Cerulean Blue* all share the same descending melody, for example. The listener can thus easily relocate to a peaceful solitude of icy tundra. ***Ben Wardle***

9

Thundercat

IT IS WHAT IT IS

BRAINFEEDER

Following on in the deeply groovy footsteps of his 2017 breakthrough third album, *Drunk*, Stephen 'Thundercat' Bruner delivers another thrilling slab of surreal jazz-funk on new album, *It Is What It Is*. The zen bassmaster is once again surrounded by a serious bunch of collaborators, with Ty Dolla $ign, Childish Gambino, Lil B, Kamasi Washington, Steve Lacy, BADBADNOTGOOD and Louis Cole all making their mark; partner-in-crime Flying Lotus repeats the co-production duties. In the same vein as its game-changing predecessor, Thundercat uses the record as a semi-confessional canvas and as he, surprisingly succinctly, puts it: "This album is about love, loss, life and the ups and downs that come with that." One of those losses was the death of his close friend and sonic ally Mac Miller, and the aftershock of grief is palpably present on many of the tracks, specifically the album's opener *Lost In Space* and then again on its closing title track. The good times are celebrated as well, and Thundercat's tongue, as ever, is nearly always located in close proximity to his cheek. Opening single *Black Qualls* is a criminally bouncy chunk of Prince-inflected retro-funk, while follow-up *Dragonball Durag* contains the improbably triumphant chat-up line: "I may be covered in cat hair/ but I still smell good". One to use the next time you're in Pets At Home? Probably not. Across its 15 tracks of joy and melancholy, *It Is What It Is* gives you a visitor's pass to Thundercat's unique world, and, boy, is it a ride. ***Gary Tipp***

8

PARKER DAY

Little Dragon
NEW ME, SAME US
NINJA TUNE

If 2017's pleasing but, ultimately, patchy *Season High* found Little Dragon struggling to compromise with one another, this time they seem to be all about harmony. *New Fiction* recalls trip-hop's early days, its pace more determined than Massive Attack's early albums but not as cheerful as Morcheeba's, while its closing piano solo would have suited a Talkin' Loud release from the same era. Yukimi Nagano is so playful against *Rush*'s jerky Caribbean rhythms, however, you could imagine Prince digging her scene, and on *Another Lover* she's soulfully suggestive of Lianne La Havas at her best. *Stay Right Here*, too, is perfectly poised, and though *Sadness* only picks up the pace slowly, its arrangements providing a reminder this is a band, not a bedroom act, there's no way you'll answer affirmatively after *Are You Feeling Sad?* ***Wyndham Wallace*** **7**

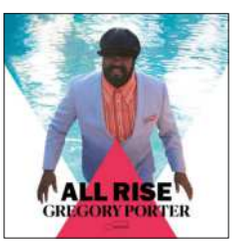
EOB
EARTH
CAPITOL

The Radiohead guitarist's debut solo album may have come about almost by accident or with no real plan for him to do it, as he tells *Long Live Vinyl* in our interview this issue. Regardless, the result is a much more considered and fine-tuned affair than you may expect in such circumstances. Merging minimal electronica, acoustic melancholy, ambient soundscapes and the odd foray into indie territory, O'Brien has made an honest and considered album that's a reflection of his diverse tastes and where he believes we're at as a planet. It's the slightly livelier material that comes out best here, such as the pulsing *Brasil* and the almost camp synth pop of *Olympik*. O'Brien's voice is also a pleasant surprise; free from his backing vocals role in Radiohead, he gives himself room to shine on an impressive first solo outing. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **7**

The Lovely Eggs
I AM MORON
EGG RECORDS

"Salted popcorn, you can go now; anabolic steroids, you can go now…" We need more bands like The Lovely Eggs. Married duo Holly Ross and David Blackwell have been forging their own path for 13 years, starting with the Ivor Cutler irony of *Have You Ever Heard A Digital Accordion?* and collaborating with Gruff Rhys, Tjinder Singh, and, er, even John Shuttleworth. Album six continues their relationship with producer David Fridmann. The sound is just as powerful as 2017's *This Is Eggland,* but the musical palette is more nuanced. *Still Second Rate* rails in the listener's face, but other tracks, such as *The Mothership* and album closer *New Dawn,* show increasing pop songwriting muscle. Their best record yet, *I Am Moron* manages to articulate the disbelief of a sane individual in a world run by idiots. Sound familiar? ***Ben Wardle*** **8**

Gregory Porter
ALL RISE
BLUE NOTE



Gregory Porter has one of those voices which, as the cliché goes, could sing the telephone directory. Although 2017's *Nat King Cole & Me* wasn't exactly reaching for the Yellow Pages, it didn't hit quite the same spot as his two previous self-penned mega-sellers *Liquid Spirit* and *Take Me To The Alley*. Fortunately for fans of his songwriting, *All Rise* is back to business, but with a twist: as Porter has it, on this album he "went big", adding a string section, a 10-member choir and a 'handpicked' brass section. None of this gets in the way of Porter's irresistible vocals, and top tunes such as *Concorde* and *Merry Go Round* already sound like future standards. The key track is *Dad Gone Thing,* where Porter's rich voice combined with the obvious autobiographical sorrow, pain and triumph, is genuinely very moving. ***Ben Wardle*** **8**

Brendan Benson
DEAR LIFE
THIRD MAN

Newly signed to The Raconteurs bandmate Jack White's label, Brendan Benson's recent times as a songwriter for hire (including tracks for The Kooks and Jake Bugg) appear to have reignited his muse. Opening with futuristic funk and distorted vocal theatrics, *Dear Life* soon settles into Benson's more familiar power-pop groove, but he's never sounded more euphoric than the gorgeous *Richest Man Alive* or the title track's rattling enthusiasm. The Raconteurs' swamp-rock sound is all over the sleazy *Evil Eyes*, before the unsettling atmospherics of *Who's Gonna Love You?* marries Benson's craft and adventurousness perfectly. Right up there with *The Alternative To Love* as his finest album, *Dear Life* sees Benson reborn, while infusing his adventures with his 25 years of exemplary power-pop melodics. It's impressive stuff. ***John Earls*** **8**

Tim Burgess
I LOVE THE NEW SKY
BELLA UNION

More than 30 years into his career, Charlatans singer Tim Burgess habitually has the air of a man who's working off the clock, doing things because they interest him. It's perhaps not surprising, then, that his fifth solo LP has a relaxed vibe, something perhaps reinforced by the songs here being written in rural Norfolk on acoustic guitar. But don't expect a folk LP. Rather, with contributions from, among others, arranger/producer/multi-instrumentalist Daniel O'Sullivan of Grumbling Fur fame, the textures of *I Love The New Sky* largely settle in baroque pop territory, while the harmonies nod to The Beach Boys. Which could be a little too tasteful if it weren't for the sly musical jokes, the playful Velvet Underground nods in *The Warhol Me,* peppering an album that repays repeated listening. ***Jonathan Wright*** **7**

Pearl Jam

GIGATON

MONKEYWRENCH/REPUBLIC

When Pearl Jam released *Dance Of The Clairvoyants*, the lead track from their 11th studio album *Gigaton*, the hypnotic slice of electro-pop took both fans and press by surprise. It was an unexpected and experimental sound for a band firmly rooted in anthemic rock. However, anyone left feeling estranged by its alien Talking Heads vibe will be heartened to learn that those ripping riffs remain as prevalent as ever – wonderfully exemplified by second single *Superblood Wolfmoon*, album opener *Who Ever Said* and heavy hitters such as *Never Destination* or *Take The Long Way*. Pearl Jam aren't simply plagiarising past glories on their first album in seven years, *Gigaton* is a record littered with interesting instrumentation and subtle sonic adventures. *Quick Escape*, possibly the album's most immediate highlight, is the perfect amalgamation. Traversing the tightrope between PJ past and present, the track features a glorious trademark guitar solo that harks back to 1991's debut *Ten*. Typically, *Gigaton* is not just a full-on rockfest. Pearl Jam take their foot off the gas on six of the 12 tracks here, but the band can be at their most biting when they slow things down. While they now inhabit a secure echelon, where they've earned a loyal fanbase with a solid back catalogue, the fire to create and speak out still burns bright. Tracks like *Seven O'Clock* and closer *River Cross*, with its haunting sign-off: "The government thrives on discontent and there's no such thing as clear, proselytising and profitising as our will all but disappears", highlight how Pearl Jam's voice remains vehemently relevant, and we should all be grateful for that. ***Dan Biggane***

8

Jonathan Wilson

DIXIE BLUR

BELLA UNION

After 15 years in Laurel Canyon, at the end of a tour as Roger Waters' musical director, Jonathan Wilson took the advice of Steve Earle and relocated to Nashville for the *Dixie Blur* sessions. Recording at Cowboy Jack Clement's famed Sound Emporium with a group of virtuoso musicians assembled by co-producer Pat Sansone of Wilco, Wilson's fourth album benefits from the fact that the erstwhile polymath is not trying to do everything himself. The group dynamic elevates a set of spacious bluegrass-flecked compositions that evidence a master craftsman. Wilson recently told *Long Live Vinyl* of the furiously productive sessions, "It was all so fast that suddenly I was trying to scramble for songs". That being so, nothing appears rushed here. Wilson's hushed Southern heritage is swept up in the aching majesty of Mark O'Connor's fiddle playing. *69 Corvette* finds him pining for the South of his childhood: "I still think of Carolina sometimes. I miss the family. I miss that feeling. I miss home." Russ Pahl's yearning pedal steel guitar is used with admirable restraint on the airy *New Home* and it's a decorative delight on the lovely, Beatles-y *Oh Girl*. Revisited old song *Korean Tea* is perhaps finest of all, a delicately woven tapestry of Spanish guitar, piano and Wilson's lonely vocal. He's said he's already looking forward to "diving back into my deeper personal solo style", but *Dixie Blur* should remind him that magic occurs when you share with your friends. ***Gary Walker***

8

Roger O'Donnell
2 RAVENS
CAROLINE

The Cure's keyboardist since *Disintegration*, Roger O'Donnell is respected outside the band for his classical work. Beginning writing after The Cure's 2018 world tour, O'Donnell wanted to capture the isolation of his life in the Devon countryside. Wreathed in a spectral beauty, the instrumental half of O'Donnell's fifth solo album is sparse and elegant. Introduced via a mutual friend, the rest features lyrics and vocals by Jennifer Pague, whose simple, haunting voice is accompanied by unsettling imagery – *Don't Tell Me*, for instance, could be Beth Gibbons reunited with Rustin Man. The closing *I'll Say Goodnight* is most in tune with O'Donnell's day job, mischievous enough to belong on *Wish*. It certainly won't give any insight into what The Cure will do next, but *2 Ravens* certainly possesses a bewitching allure all of its own. ***John Earls*** **8**

Jack Hues
PRIMITIF
DAWN CHORUS

Jack Hues is best known as the frontman of Wang Chung, the primarily 80s act who hit it big on both sides of the Atlantic with hit single *Dance Hall Days* (which, way back when, was accompanied by a promo video directed by Derek Jarman). Hues also spent time recording with Tony Banks from Genesis on side project, Strictly Inc. Featuring able assistance from Syd Arthur's Joel and Josh Magill, his long-time-in-the-making solo debut *Primitif* is a double album and contains echoes of old-school Canterbury Prog (where both Hues and Syd Arthur reside) and good old-fashioned art rock, with lead single *Whitstable Beach* a standout. When questioned about the album, Hues revealed: "The emotional landscape is primal, the means of production were basic, if not exactly primitive, so this is *Primitif*." We can't start to fault his logic. ***Gary Tipp*** **7**

GoGo Penguin
GOGO PENGUIN
BLUE NOTE

It's album five time for the Manchester three-piece, who have been lugging the "Mercury-nominated" tag around with them since their second *v.2.0* in 2014. They subsequently signed to Blue Note and made two more records and one soundtrack between non-stop touring. Now in a position where they can sell out Brixton Academy, they finally took stock and spent six months writing this self-titled collection. It's less obviously 'jazz' than its predecessors and would sit comfortably alongside Keith Jarrett, Jan Garbarek or Jack DeJohnette on ECM. However, drummer Rob Turner claims to spend more time on his laptop than his kit, while pianist Chris Illingworth uses a delay pedal to trigger backwards loops of himself; so while it manages to be a great modern classical album, *GoGo Penguin* also has its sights set on the dancefloor. ***Ben Wardle*** **8**

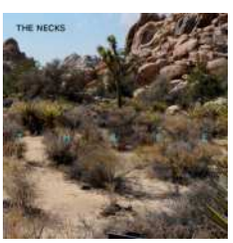
Spector
NON-FICTION
BLOOD

Five years after career-stalling second album *Moth Boys*, Spector remind everyone why they were once so hyped in a handy round-up of the two EPs and four standalone singles the alt-pop favourites have released since 2018. There's also the charming *Bryndon 2*, exclusive to the vinyl here. Fred Macpherson's lyrics sometimes fall the wrong side of clever/try-hard, while attempts at minimalism like *Wild Guess* fail to totally convince. Mostly, though, the five-piece still sound like the most ambitious gang in town, just that one lucky break away from becoming a new Pulp, with the same gutter grandeur of *Razzmatazz*-era Jarvis. Armed with songs as big as *Fine Not Fine* and the soaring *I Won't Wait*, Spector are deserving of a fresh dose of attention. Heroically daft they may be, but at least they're heroic. ***John Earls*** **7**

Ron Sexsmith
HERMITAGE
COOKING VINYL

Ron Sexsmiths's 16th album was recorded in the front room of his new home in the Ontario countryside. Prior to this, the former Toronto resident had been slaving away at the singer-songwriter coal face for 30 years, embedding his songs in the catalogues of artists ranging from Tracey Thorn to Michael Bublé, without nabbing a hit of his own. So has a new bucolic existence affected, as the biog has it, "Canada's foremost song and dance man"? Opening track *Spring Of The Following Year* starts with bird song and sees a new-found lyrical optimism; it's gentle, slight and maybe even a little too content. Fortunately, Sexsmith's dextrous way with a barbed word and an unexpected melodic twist soon re-emerges and by the time we reach *Small Minded World*, *Dig Nation* and *You Don't Wanna Hear It*, the old Ron is back. ***Ben Wardle*** **7**

The Necks
THREE
NORTHERN SPY



Dropping the needle on track one, *Bloom*, might lead you to think you've accidentally put on Aphex Twin's latest. The frenetic burst of jagged rhythms and glitchy beats is as kinetic and immersive an opening as on any of their albums. It sets the tone for another record on which predicting where this instrumental trio will go next is impossible. There's the usual masterful deftness of gently rolling bass and jazz piano gliding alongside such spasmodic rhythms. The other two (of three) pieces, both run to around 22 minutes, too, but move at much varying paces. *Lovelock* unfurls in quietly tense and dense tones, like a score to an entire film, whereas the closing *Further* seems to capture an essence of both: percussion fizzes away relentlessly but subtly over a sensual bass groove that hooks you in until its final moments. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **9**

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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DMA's
THE GLOW
BMG

Touring partners to Liam Gallagher, Courteeners and Gerry Cinnamon, Aussie trio DMA's have reached arena status from their previous two albums thanks to their no-nonsense way with an anthemic chorus. The band's raucous approach masks how singer Tommy O'Dell and guitarist Johnny Took actually began as a studio-based electronic project. Working with Madonna/ New Order producer Stuart Price, DMA's now add dance grooves, while maintaining the gut-punch directness. *Round And Around* and single *Life Is A Game Of Changing* will win over Doves fans anxiously awaiting their studio comeback, and O'Dell has a new tenderness in his voice on the ballads. One of the most riotous new live bands, DMA's have managed to bring that energy to the studio and fully deserve to bask in the glow of their success. ***John Earls*** **8**

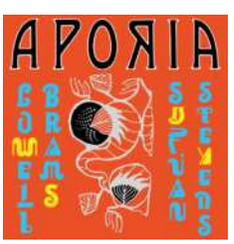
Daniel Avery & Alessandro Cortini
ILLUSION OF TIME
MUTE

This collaboration between the UK electronic musician Daniel Avery and the Nine Inch Nails member Alessandro Cortini began before the pair had even met. Simply a back and forth, free from pressure, deadline or rules, it allowed a sense of freeform experimentation. The result is a stirring album that offers hissing industrial ambience alongside almost pastoral soundscapes. Weaving between minimal electronic, dark ambient and heavy synth wave, it's an album that manages to feel foreboding and brooding as often as it does unexpectedly light. The pair have managed to land on something that feels coherent yet also split – it's the equivalent of moving back and forth in a club between main-room eruptions and chill-out meditations. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **8**

Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs Pigs
VISCERALS
ROCKET RECORDINGS

Pigs x7's Black Sabbath-esque stoner rock was essentially a bit of fun that got out of hand. The rising success of the band came as a surprise, perhaps most of all to the band themselves. However, while that carefree sense of fun remains ever-present in their approach, on *Viscerals* the band feel like a much more serious operation. The monster riffs are still present, touching upon sludge metal via doomy drones and fiery explosions of noise guitar, but there's a real sense of evolution present as well. It's an album that feels rooted in golden-era American guitar music (the influence of Melvins, The Jesus Lizard, Butthole Surfers and Sonic Youth is audible) and like those bands, there's a sense of the unknown that comes along with the cacophonous noise. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **7**

Sufjan Stevens & Lowell Brams
APORIA
ASTHMATIC KITTY



The relationship between Sufjan Stevens and Lowell Brams runs deep. Brams is the Lowell of *Carrie & Lowell*, former husband of Stevens' troubled mother and co-founder of Asthmatic Kitty. He's also a musician in his own right, and *Aporia* marks his second collaboration with his stepson after Stevens previously worked on Brams' *Music For Insomnia*. Edited from jams compiled over years, largely instrumental and influenced by Vangelis, Boards Of Canada and Eno, this isn't a record for anyone hoping for new songs. But for those willing to take a chance on experimental projects, the music here is melodic, assured and at points stately – remarkable considering how few of *Aporia*'s 21 tracks break three minutes. ***Jonathan Wright*** **7**

WHAT'S ON IN THE SHOP

JUMBO RECORDS
LEEDS

KEELEY FORSYTH
DEBRIS
LEAF
This came out in January this year on The Leaf label and is a massive shop favourite. Dark, austere songwriting with a real shadowy beauty that reminds us of Nico and Robert Wyatt. The debut album features collaborators Matthew Bourne and Sam Hobbs. You're unlikely to hear much better in 2020.

WILD BILLY CHILDISH & THE CHATHAM SINGERS
KINGS OF THE MEDWAY DELTA
DAMAGED GOODS
We've always been huge fans of Billy Childish at Jumbo Records, but this could be a late-career highlight. It's blues, it's raw, it's garagey, the cover is great, and we absolutely love it.

THE MYSTERY KINDAICHI BAND
THE ADVENTURES OF KINDAICHI KOSUKE
WEWANTSOUNDS
An 'imaginary' soundtrack to a cult detective book series by Seishi Yokomizo. This is the first reissue outside Japan for this disco-funk classic, and the album has caused quite a stir among Jumbo staff and customers alike.

Basia Bulat
ARE YOU IN LOVE?
SECRET CITY

After 2016's *Good Advice* landed Basia Bulat with a nomination for the Polaris Music Prize, she now returns with an album on the back of a relocation out to California's Joshua Tree. Inspired by classic songwriters, such as Minnie Ripperton and Emmylou Harris, Bulat has tapped into a feeling of quiet yet powerful introspection. There are touches of Americana via pop and folk on *Are You In Love?* but there is also a contemporary sheen to the album that is a far cry from a mimicry of the past. As ever, Bulat's voice demonstrates a great range, scaling seamlessly from a delicate whisper to a raspy, powerful wail. It's an album that manages to weave between grand musical statements, driven by sweeping strings and surging compositions, to more stripped-back moments. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **7**

Nap Eyes
SNAPSHOT OF A BEGINNER
JAGJAGUWAR

A step-up in ambition on album four from Nova Scotia's Nap Eyes. Recorded at Aaron Dessner's Long Pond studio, Nigel Chapman's meandering sketches have been whittled down to charming indie-folk songs of high calibre. Chapman's laconic vocals, all extended vowels and Dylan-isms, bring to mind Kevin Morby, particularly on the exultant *Primordial Soup*, Chapman standing on the rocks whipped by the 'salt breeze', pondering life's big questions. Guitarist Brad Loughead's effects-heavy guitar is deft and inventive throughout, notably on the lazily contemplative *Mystery Calling*. Later, he cuts loose thrillingly on the seven-minute *Real Thoughts*, while on playful takedown *Mark Zuckerberg* Chapman wonders whether the Facebook uberlord is in fact a ghost. Things move slowly in Nap Eyes' world and that's something to cherish. ***Gary Walker*** **8**

Dance Gavin Dance
AFTERBURNER
RISE RECORDS

Continuing their lightning-fast release schedule, Dance Gavin Dance are back with a ninth studio album. Still riding the wave of mainstream success that began with *Mothership*, there's an obvious shift towards more radio-friendly instrumentation here. Some of these pop-oriented tracks are the most memorable, and with such an appreciation for 2009's *Happiness*, there will no doubt be a devoted portion of the old guard hailing the return of the funk. That's not to say the heaviness is gone; there's plenty of it peppered across these 13 tracks, with *Say Hi* being a highlight that sees Jon Mess' vocals at their tortured best. Yet despite possessing some of DGD's boldest moments and their masterful blend of pop and post-hardcore, there's still something missing; something that even after countless listens we still can't seem to put our finger on. ***Chris Mackin*** **7**

Cable Ties
FAR ENOUGH
MERGE

The second album from Melbourne's Cable Ties is their first for Merge Records and it fits neatly within the roster's selection of frenetic indie rock. There are hooks aplenty on this record, as it careers through riot grrl snarl to fuzzed-out alt-rock – resembling everyone from Wipers to Sleater-Kinney along the way. It's an unrelentingly high-octane album, guitars are frequently in overdrive and semi-shouted vocals wail and snarl. There's an anger and punch to *Far Enough* that is reflected in the lyrics, which focus on issues of the time, but the band manage to avoid falling into simply raging polemic. Musically, the album covers pretty well-worn ground, but there's an undeniable vivacity to the delivery, along with a seamless knack for melody that makes it a gritty, potent, yet rewarding listen. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **7**

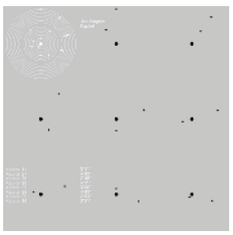
MY NEW ALBUM
M WARD

"I think music subconsciously, whether writing or listening, acts as a filter for me," explains the Monsters Of Folk member of an album that was a cathartic outlet for him. "Helping to process all the bad news into something new to build from. Some records to me are like self-fulfilling prophecies. Visualising change to wish something into being. Those are the records that inspired this one. It's a sci-fi fast forward to a more silent night many generations from here to a maybe-era where movement is free again."

M Ward
MIGRATION STORIES
ANTI- RECORDS

The always busy, always discerning Monster Of Folk delivers a prescient album of blissful, largely instrumental lullabies for his 10th solo LP. Working with Arcade Fire's Tim Kingsbury, Richard Reed Parry and producer Craig Silvey, *Migration Stories* was recorded at the band's Montreal studios. The feel is tender and sonambulant, with pretty much everything captured first take, but beneath the quietude of Ward's sleepy croon, lies a dark mood, the record his vehicle for channeling the troubling news events surrounding him. Opener *Migration Of Souls* and the breezy *Unreal City*, handclaps and all, are imagined escapes from the apocalyptic swirl of 2020. The gentle shuffle of *Heaven's Nail And Hammer* is wonderfully soothing and his take on the cowboy ballad *Along The Santa Fe Trail* is a treat. Effortless beauty. ***Gary Walker*** **7**

Jan Wagner
KAPITEL
QUIET LOVE RECORDS



Like his 2018 debut *Nummern*, Jan Wagner's second album uses the piano as a foundation for eight quietly haunting tracks whose anonymity restricts listeners' preconceptions. The results are most reminiscent of A Winged Victory For The Sullen, whether on opener *Kapitel 11*, whose brooding soundscape slowly blooms then gently wilts, or *Kapitel 25*, where Wagner teases out a tender, Dustin O'Halloran-style melody that's finally overwhelmed by textured synths. On *Kapitel 28*, however, additional drums lend the piece an urgency that might have suited Nils Frahm's *Spaces*, while, at the other end of the spectrum, the shimmering *Kapitel 36* recalls Harold Budd and Brian Eno's masterpiece, *The Pearl*. Nonetheless, it's labelmate Rosa Anschütz's monotone spoken words on *Kapitel 30* which, surprisingly, prove most affecting. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

Ren Harvieu
REVEL IN THE DRAMA
BELLA UNION

Having recovered from the frustrations her 2012 debut bequeathed her, Ren Harvieu returns at last, emboldened by The Magic Numbers' Romeo Stodart, who co-produces this second album. With its timeless, studied songwriting, *Revel In The Drama* boasts a cabaret-esque quality, like Nick Cave doing Broadway, its dark side balanced by a twist of mischievousness. *Strange Thing*'s a string-adorned, endearingly dynamic carnival that barely pauses for breath, and *Cruel Disguise*'s twanging guitars compete with growling organs to confirm its darkness. Her rich vocal swoops gracefully, sometimes playfully, as on the redemptive *Tomorrow's Girl Today*, but more often forlorn, as on the mournful *You (Don't Know Me)* and, even more so, on *Spirit Me Away*, though its doomy Morricone-esque chimes can't quite dampen her spirits. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

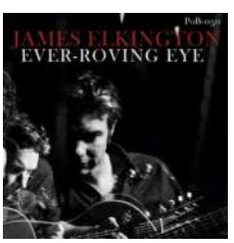
The Leaf Library
ABOUT MINERALS
WHERE IT'S AT IS WHERE YOU ARE

Less follow-up and more companion piece to last year's fine *The World Is A Bell*, during whose mixing it was recorded, *About Minerals* is a more ambient collection first released last year as a limited run of 30 cassettes. Similar, if more oblique, echoes of cult act Earwig remain, most notably in the quietly bubbling *An Edge, An Ending* and the title track's hypnotic minimalism, where Melinda Bronstein's vocals float above a pulsating bed of synths. But *Layers Of Regret* is a gravity-defying chamber of silvery echoes, while *Beach Loom* offers the stillness of Arvo Pärt's tintinnabuli mixed with Labradford's quiet drones. Fans of Loscil's *Equivalents* will also find pleasure in *Weather Wires*, which moves in slow-motion, concluding with disembodied voices to heighten its appealingly disorientating effect. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

Twisted Wheel
SATISFYING THE RITUAL
TWISTED WHEEL

Briefly hyped after 2009's self-titled debut album led to Oasis and Paul Weller support tours, singer Jonny Brown has since rivalled fellow Manc Mark E Smith for getting through band members: co-writer Harry Lavin is Twisted Wheel's fifth bassist, Ben Robinson the fourth drummer. You can see why Brown perseveres and why Liam Gallagher remains a fan: on their first album since 2012, Twisted Wheel excel at primitive punk and, on *Wheels Of Love,* bring a supple Northern Soul backbeat to Brown's manic vocals. The ballads are less successful, with *Black And Blue* and *DNA* sludgy AOR and the title track sub-Mondays waffle. They're not reinventing the wheel, twisted or otherwise but, for deceptively simple adrenalised thrills, Brown deserves his Manchester cult figure status. Just don't sign up to be in his rhythm section. ***Joh Earls*** **7**

James Elkington
EVER-ROVING EYE
PARADISE OF BACHELORS



Since upping sticks and moving from these shores to Chicago in the late 90s, nimble-fingered guitarist James Elkington has become a trusted sideman, swapping ideas and licks with everyone from Richard Thompson to Jeff Tweedy to Tortoise. In-between his production and arrangement work, Elkington also finds time to pursue a solo career with his latest release, *Ever-Roving Eye*, following on from 2017's praised debut, *Wintres Woma.* Recorded at Wilco's Loft, this fresh collection of finely crafted songs treads a similar jazzy, folk-inflected path as the first, summoning up the spirit of early Pentangle, as on laconic opener *Nowhere Time* and the epic title track. That's not to say Elkington is content to simply glance back over his shoulder, far from it, as he expands his sonic template into more expansive and gently psychedelic territory. ***Gary Tipp*** **8**

Tamikrest
TAMOTAÏT
GLITTERBEAT

The term desert rock has unjustly become associated with white dudes from America playing tweaked blues rock, but Tamikrest are a band that truly define the term. The collection of Tuareg musicians, led by Ousmane Ag Mossa, not only hail from the Sahara Desert, but their music wholly embodies the tonalities we've come to expect from it. Twisting guitar lines unravel, sometimes subtly, sometimes fiercely, weaving between Hendrix-esque rock, psychedelia and local traditional Tuareg music – marrying Eastern and Western traditions with deft grace. You'd need to speak the language to pick up on the deeply political lyrics that reflect the difficulties their community has been through, but the seamless guitar licks, locked grooves and often explosive rock is a universal connection to be found. ***Daniel Dylan Wray*** **7**

Too Fast To Live...

ANDREW KRIVINE

PAVILION £30

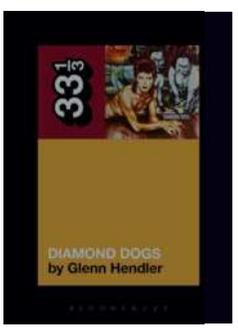
If there was a Venn diagram with punk and post-punk fans as one outer circle, and graphic designers as the other, then Andrew Krivine's *Too Fast To Live Too Young To Die* would nestle comfortably in the connecting curve. Krivine started collecting punk graphics (ads, sleeves, tour posters) back in 1977 and has amassed a vast collection from both sides of the Atlantic, with artwork from The Clash, Pistols, Buzzcocks and Joy Division rubbing shoulders with Television, Blondie and The Cramps. Subtitled *Punk & Post Punk Graphics 1976-1986*, *Too Fast To Live…* is a well-curated selection that demonstrates just how big a lump of snot the movement hawked up into the face of the graphic design of the day. A gobbet that still leaves an indelible mark. But don't just take Krivine's word for it. The book relies on a starry cast of design experts to run their rule over the significance of the content. This includes cut & paste gurus Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville, who contribute the spot-on artwork for the front and back covers. ***Gary Tipp***

9

Diamond Dogs

GLENN HENDLER

BLOOMSBURY £9.99



Another day, another US academic dives head-first into the nerdfest that is the *33 1/3* series of classic album studies. This time, it's Glenn Hendler, Professor of English at Fordham University, who takes the plunge. And the album he chooses to write his dissertation, sorry, book about is *Diamond Dogs*. Bowie dismissed the record in later years as "my usual basket of apocalyptic visions," and with its uneasy marriage of George Orwell and William Burroughs shoehorned into its overarching 'concept' there's always been an air of cut and shut about the 1974 release. Hendler acknowledges the defects and shifts his analytical brain in gear to explore the album's every nook. Much of his musing is entertaining, it's never anything less than passionate and often compelling. There are certain blind alleys, such as the way Bowie alters how he addresses the audience in his songs (the so-called 'I/You dynamic'), that you wish he had never stumbled down. But that's not to detract from the miracle of endurance that witnesses one man writing so much about a single album. ***GT***

7

Have A Bleedin Guess

PAUL HANLEY

ROUTE PUBLISHING £12.99

Paul Hanley joined The Fall at 15 and was one half of the mythic two-drummer line-up of the early 80s. This makes him uniquely qualified to recount the story of the band's most uncompromising and fully realised statement of intent, *Hex Enduction Hour*. Recorded in a cave in Iceland and a disused cinema in Hitchin (both were converted into recording studios, to be fair), The Fall's finest 60 minutes demonstrates how great art can be borne out of chaos, tyranny and cheap equipment. Replete with a raft of new interviews from those who were there, *Have A Bleedin Guess* tells the full story of the album, including how each song was written, performed and recorded. At the heart of proceedings lies the fiend/genius Mark E Smith, whose Beefheartian provocations pushed this magic band to artistic heights never previously scaled. Despite being subjected to his own fair share of abuse during the recording process, Hanley, somehow, remains even-handed throughout, which is quite a trick in itself. Quite simply, a stunning book about a stunning album. ***GT***

9

Kraftwerk: Future Music From Germany

UWE SCHÜTTE

PENGUIN £9.99

Author Uwe Schütte first heard Kraftwerk as a car-sick nine-year-old, appropriately enough on the autobahn in his native Germany. The band then intermittently flitted in and out of his life, until a lifelong allegiance was cemented at a Brixton Academy gig in 2004. Since then, the Reader in German at Aston University has organised a brace of sell-out academic conferences about the band, one in Brum, the other in Düsseldorf, Kraftwerk's home city. All of which means Schütte is very well placed to offer up his treatise on the electronic pioneers, and he expertly traces the cultural context of the band, and their evolution from the art scene in Düsseldorf to global influencers. Kraftwerk are the real deal as far as he is concerned, fusing music with technology, graphic design and performance – he even argues that it is unlikely we will ever see an addition to the discography, as a ninth studio release would "wreck the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is the octology of the Catalogue-complex". And who are we to argue with that? ***GT***

7

Q&A

PAUL HANLEY

You interview your bandmates in the book, how reliable was the collective memory?
"There was a bit of confusion as to what month we recorded the album, and Marc and Craig have different recollections about how *The Classical* came about. Apart from that, we were pretty much on the same page."

Did your appreciation of Mark E Smith alter while writing the book?
"My appreciation of his work certainly did. I was amazed at how everything fitted together – the title, the cover, the way the lyrics share themes… *Hex* is a real body of work. My opinion of him as a person didn't really change, but I did gain some insight into his working methods."

How easy was it to be impartial when telling the story?
"It was massively important to me that I stayed neutral. The way I approached it was that my opinion was no more important than anyone else's, but it was no less important either. But I tried to keep opinions separate from the narrative."

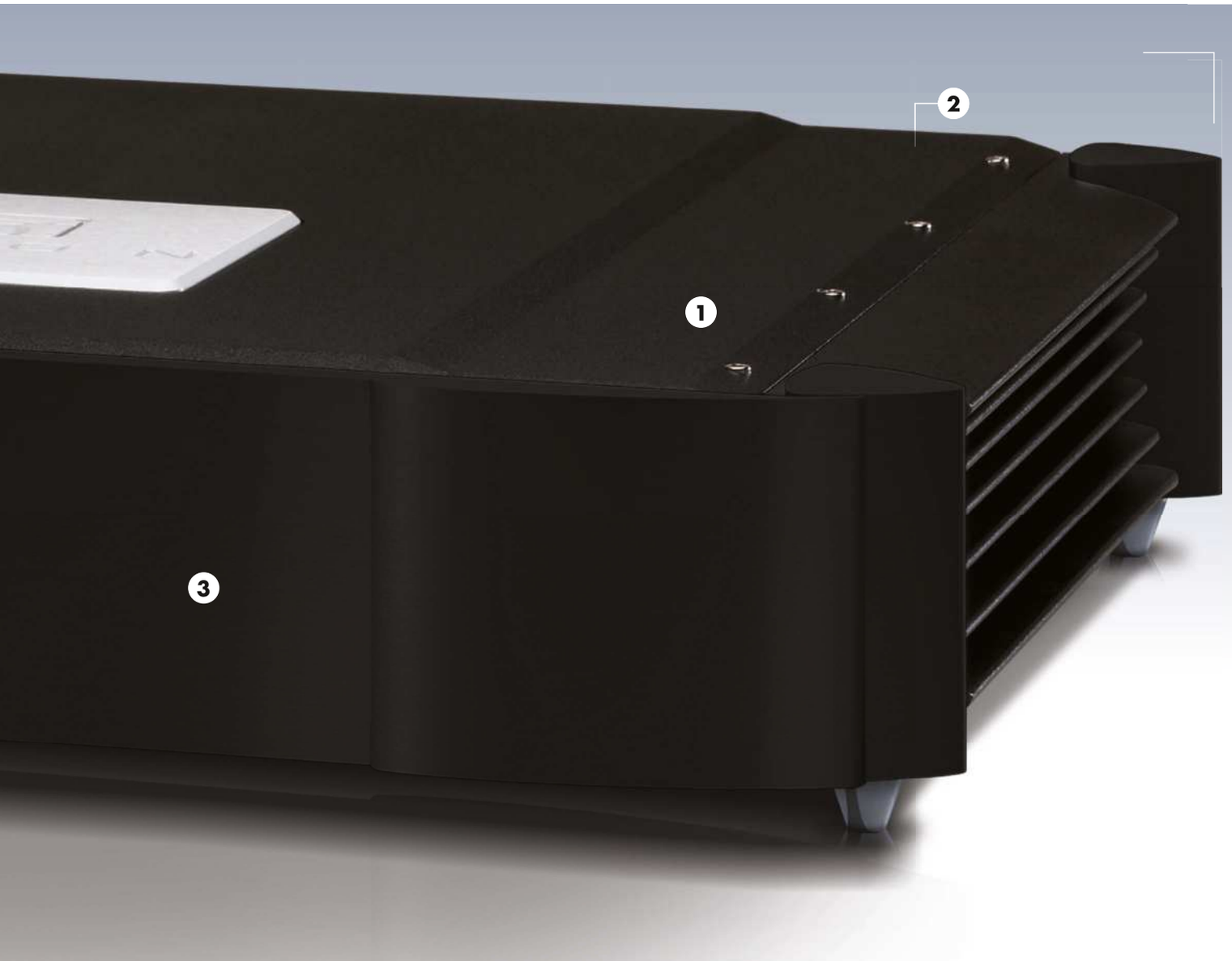
DREAM MACHINES

MOON 810LP

PHONO AMPLIFIER

£10,900 simaudio.com

The Moon series from Simaudio offers high-end listening quality, and this stylish phono amplifier is no exception to the rule



Billed as "the ultimate phono preamp", Sim Audio's attractive Moon 810LP is simple to operate and reassuringly quiet in action. That's partly down to the large power supply, packing in 40,000uF of capacitance. That's not all though; Sim Audio take internal parts isolation seriously and we love them to bits for that fact alone. Hence, the power supply is featured in an isolated enclosure made out of satin-coated 14-gauge steel. That one feature says everything about the build quality of this phono amplifier. Its sound is bang-on neutral, too, and it will fit within any system you care to match it with. Finally, you may laugh, but the Moon offers value for money – it will contend with similar boxes selling at five times the price.

❶ FLOATING SUSPENSION

The dedicated audio circuit board is mounted on a fancy 5-point gel-based floating suspension, derived from the company's M-Octave technology, originally developed for the reference 850P pre-amplifier.

❷ SWITCHABLE SETTINGS

You're given switchable capacitance and impedance load settings, enabling you to tweak MM and MC cartridges. That includes a load level of 16 steps, from 40dB to 70dB.

❸ BUILD QUALITY

The internal design complements the external build quality to enhance the low-noise performance, which reaches digital levels of silence.

SHOW REPORT

BRISTOL HI-FI SHOW

New turntables may have been a little thin on the ground at one of the UK's biggest hi-fi shows, but there was still plenty of audiophile gear catching the ear in Bristol, as **John Pickford** reports

Back in February, when mass gatherings were still allowed, we visited the Bristol Hi-Fi Show, the biggest event of its kind in the UK, to check out what's new in vinyl replay. Many fresh products were launched at the show this year, though new turntables were a little scarce. Turntable supremos Dual were showing an impressive range of new, affordable vinyl spinners; elsewhere, high-end manufacturer AVIDHiFi were producing sweet music with one of their entry-level systems, headed up by the recently reviewed Ingenium Plug & Play turntable.

Rega were demonstrating their new System One, comprising the multi-award winning Planar 1 turntable, io integrated amplifier and Kyte bookshelf speakers. This system sounded wonderful for the all-in price of £999, putting many more expensive setups to shame.

One clear trend at this year's show, alongside that of good things coming in increasingly small packages, was for heritage or retro-styled loudspeakers. JBL launched the funky-looking L82 standmount, a scaled-down version of the L100 Classic, both of which were sporting brightly coloured foam grilles straight out of the 1970s. Rogers introduced the AB3a Active Subwoofer System to complement their legendary BBC-designed mini-monitor LS3/5a and were also showing the larger LS5/9 speakers on bespoke stands. They also displayed their E20a/II Classic Tube Integrated Amplifier, which we're looking forward to putting through its paces.

Harbeth, another manufacturer with BBC heritage, occupied two wonderful-sounding rooms with their new XD series of speakers, which update their proprietary RADIAL cone technology, while Spendor showcased their Classic range, including an intriguing new LS3/5a-sized mini-monitor – watch this space.

On a more modern note, Neat Acoustics unveiled their new ribbon tweeter-equipped EKSTRA and MINISTRA speakers, both of which feature a sealed iso-baric arrangement that acts as an integral subwoofer system. The smaller MINISTRA, designed for close-to-wall positioning, sounded agile and articulate, even when battling to be heard above the subsonic rumble coming from the nearby AV surround sound rooms. A full review is in the pipeline.

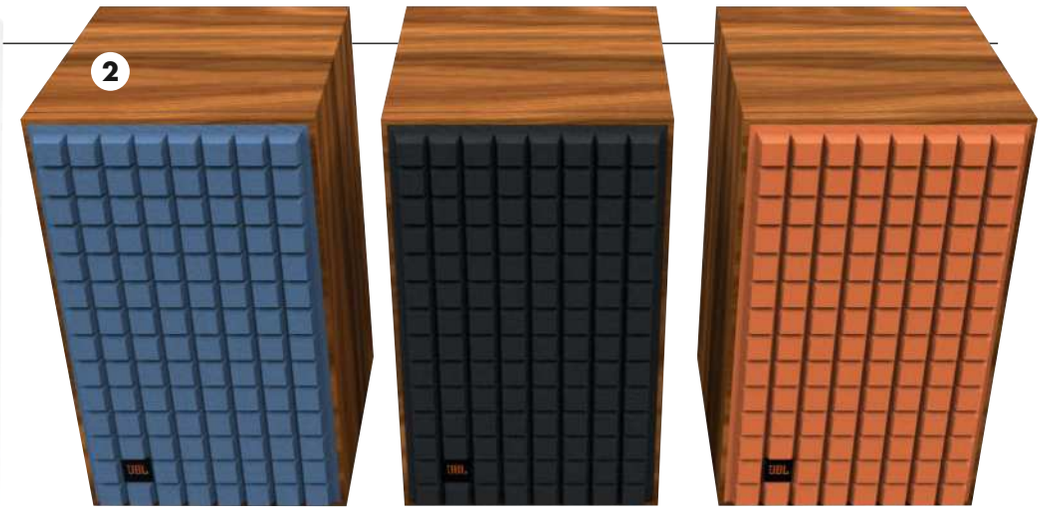
Danish manufacturer JERN demonstrated their remarkable room-filling 14 ES speakers, which come with a unique cast iron housing, and raised more than a few eyebrows by producing a full-range room-filling sound from their diminutive enclosures.

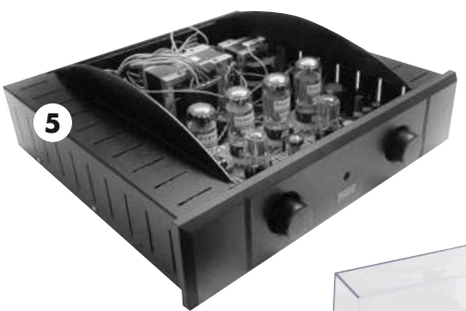
The Monitor Audio room was constantly well attended as they demonstrated the sixth generation of their Bronze range of speakers. Sporting brand new drivers and improved build quality, we look forward to testing them thoroughly in the not too distant future.

Moving away from loudspeakers, Chord Electronics created something of a buzz at the show with their new high-end ULTIMA 5 and ULTIMA 6 stereo power amplifiers. Employing groundbreaking feed-forward topology, both of these stereo units share DNA from the company's flagship monoblock amplifiers. Finally, Keith Monks were demonstrating their new Prodigy record cleaning machine and we went home with one of the first review units – turn to page 110 for a full appraisal.

The 33rd Bristol Hi-Fi Show showcased some excellent new kit, but please, can we have some more turntables next year? ●

HIGH-END MANUFACTURERS AVID WERE PRODUCING SWEET MUSIC WITH ONE OF THEIR ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEMS





❶ Neat Acoustics' ribbon tweeter-equipped Ekstra floorstanders ❷ The retro cool of the newly released JBL L82 standmounts ❸ Monitor Audio's new Bronze speakers were attracting plenty of attention ❹ The frighteningly good entry-level Ingenium Plug & Play turntable from AVIDHifi ❺ Rogers' E20a/II Classic Tube Integrated Amplifier ❻ Spendor's new Classic range, including the LS3/5a-sized mini-monitor ❼ Rega's all-in-one System One setup, which retails for a whole pound less than £1,000 ❽ Danish brand JERN's tiny cast iron, room-filling 14 ES speakers ❾ Chord Electronics' ULTIMA 5 stereo power amplifier

KEITH MONKS PRODIGY RECORD CLEANING MACHINE

£795 www.keith-monks.com

A new stylish record cleaner has **John Pickford** dreaming of a life without crackle

We've all experienced crackly records that, on visual inspection look undamaged. More often than not, the source of the interference is hidden dirt, embedded deeply in the grooves. While a wipe with a damp cloth or careful wash with lukewarm soapy water might help restore a filthy, half-knackered bargain from a charity shop, the only way to clean vinyl properly is with a record cleaning machine.

There are various vacuum-powered units available and most have three things in common: they're big, noisy and expensive. Keith Monks Audio know a thing or two about cleaning records professionally, as they produced the first commercial record cleaning machine (RCM) in 1969.

Originally developed to meet the exacting demands of the BBC, the original Keith Monks RCM soon found favour with serious record collectors with large collections and deep pockets. Even a few short years ago, it was impossible to buy a new professional-standard RCM for under four figures.

The Keith Monks RCM bucks the trend with the sleek, elegant and (relatively) quiet Prodigy. It employs the company's (and the world's) first Threadless Point Suction System, which they will now incorporate into their more expensive models.

Made from bamboo, the natural wood finish of my review sample is stylish, while an internal LED continuously changes colour in use, illuminating a perimeter strip around the machine as well as the container of clear cleaning fluid.

THE PRODIGY'S PLATTER IS NO BIGGER THAN THE LABEL AREA OF AN LP

Whereas most RCMs feature a revolving 12" platter, much the same as a turntable, along with a suction arm that cleans a whole record side in a couple of rotations, the Prodigy's platter is no bigger than the label area of an LP, while the suction arm features a precision nozzle.

This means it works its way across the playing surface, cleaning as it goes in around two minutes per side. Unlike a tonearm, which moves from a record's outer edge to its inner groove, the Prodigy's starting position is in the inner 'dead wax', and it cleans from the inside out.

Cleaning a record is easy with the Prodigy. Simply place the disc onto the platter, set it spinning, apply some of the supplied cleaning fluid and use the microfibre roller to spread the fluid evenly across the record's surface and work it deep into the grooves. Then place the nozzle on the suction arm in the inner groove and two minutes (per side) later you have a clean and dry record ready to play.

Be sure to have a supply of fresh, lined inner sleeves, though, if you wish to avoid the 'dirty feet into clean socks' problem. The cleaning fluid itself is a special blend of natural plant-based active ingredients and triple-filtered distilled water, which I find superior to either the alcohol or detergent-based fluids I've used previously. Detergent, I have found, has a nasty habit of loosening grime in the grooves, that is only removed when your stylus literally gouges it out; it's not a pretty sight.

And it's not just old, dirty records that benefit from a professional clean either, as the Prodigy effectively removes unwanted artefacts of the pressing process, as I discover when cleaning my copy of the remixed Beatles *Abbey Road* album released late in 2019. My copy was slightly noisy from the get-go, with some low-level crackle throughout, yet one clean on the Prodigy and the noise vanishes. With that in mind, I dig out a recent reissue of Talk Talk's *Spirit Of Eden*, which was given to me by a friend who was dissatisfied with the quality of the pressing. This album has moments of near-silence and dramatic dynamic swings, so you really need a pristine copy to enjoy it properly. A brief listen confirms the shocking audio quality, both intrusive crackle and the odd loud pop, but one good clean on the Prodigy and the record not only sounds clean and quiet, but also more vibrant than I've ever heard it before.

This seems to be a wonderful by-product of the cleaning process; eliminating crackle and static-induced distortion allows the music to be heard more clearly, with fine detail no longer being masked by intrusive fizzy high frequencies.

The new Keith Monks Prodigy is a superb cleaning machine and a worthwhile investment for anyone with a cherished collection of vinyl. ●

VERDICT

10

PROS Outstanding results, easy to use, improves sound quality, plant-based active ingredients, stylish good looks, value for money

CONS None

POWERED LOUDSPEAKER

KANTO TUK

£749
kantoaudio.com

Of particular interest if you have limited space, **John Pickford** is mightily impressed by a pair of fully featured powered speakers with a warm, impactful sound

Canadian company Kanto specialise in powered bookshelf speakers with rear-panel connectors to accept all types of sources. The TUK is the top model in the range and while it's not aimed at the audiophile market per se, its comprehensive connectivity and built-in amplifiers will appeal to those who have limited space yet still appreciate good sound quality.

While you can connect your computer, phone, Smart TV, or any other digital player via Bluetooth, it also has RCA phono inputs to hook up a turntable and, most importantly, an onboard phono stage.

The TUK is powered by a 130W (65W per channel) Class D amplifier and incorporates an active crossover that filters out frequencies below 80Hz when used with one of Kanto's subwoofers. Mid and bass frequencies are handled by a 5.25" aluminium woofer, while an AMT (Air Motion Transformer) tweeter takes care of the treble. AMT drivers, like ribbon tweeters, have a lightning-fast response compared to regular dome units and, likewise, aluminium drivers are known for their tight and articulate bass, so the TUK has excellent pace, rhythm and timing.

Below the woofer on the front baffle of the active speaker, there is a 3.5mm headphone socket, a sensor for the supplied remote control and a rotary control for volume adjustment and input selection along with an input LED display.

The rear panel accepts myriad input sources, power cable and a USB charge point, while also being home to the sub-out, power switch, fuse and a bass reflex port. While the port aids bass performance and depth, it does need space to work effectively, so it's best to avoid flush mounting to a wall.

Fully powered up, I begin by spinning *Fixture Picture* from Aldous Harding's *Designer* (4AD 2019) and hear a full-bodied sound quite disproportionate to the speakers' size. This is a simple yet wide-band recording and the TUK delivers the midrange and upper frequencies in good proportion. This tightens things up and, in my listening room, provides the best tonal balance.

Complex jazz/rock courtesy of Nucleus' *We'll Talk About It Later* (Vertigo 1971) doesn't confuse the TUK at all. This album is a tough test for speakers with timing issues and, as I suspect, the TUK has no trouble latching onto the groove.

Losing the wild rock element for some spiritual jazz, John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* (Impulse! 1965) again highlights the fine rhythmic capability of the TUK. It's here I detect a slight hardening in the midrange, noticeable on piano, and a little unevenness as Coltrane moves through his instrument's register. This is a minor criticism and although Kanto do not insist on a lengthy running-in period, it's likely this element of the TUK's performance will soften with time.

It's hard to imagine that anyone in the market for a fully featured powered speaker of this nature would be dissatisfied with the sound they produce. To borrow an album title from The Who, the TUK system is *Meaty Beaty Big and Bouncy*, not too obviously 'hi-fi' but bags of fun with a warm, musical heart. ●

VERDICT 9

PROS Warm, powerful sound, toe-tapping rhythms, forgiving of poor recordings, comprehensive connectivity, no extra amplification required
CONS Slightly opaque midrange

UPGRADE KIT

STACK AUDIO SERENE LP12

£618
stackaudio.co.uk

Stack Audio has produced a suite of upgrade parts for the highly tweakable Linn Sondek turntable. **Paul Rigby** tackles the entire kit, known as the Serene

The LP12 is a three-point suspended sub-chassis design consisting of a rigid structure and a sprung platform that supports the record and arm using a single point bearing. It's also been around since the early 70s. Because of that longevity and the changes that have been imposed upon the design during that time, it's now not enough to simply say that you have an LP12 Sondek.

Nowadays, you have to answer an additional question: what type or variant do you have? The reason is the Sondek has experienced a gamut of upgrades and tweaks. Partly from the host company Linn, but also via a swathe of third-party outfits who have built and sold add-on parts to enhance and upgrade the performance of the machine. All of these parts have been created and sold at a wide range of prices.

Stack Audio is the latest company to try its hand at improving the sonic character of the LP12. The Serene consists of a top plate (£150), a baseboard (£140), an arm board (£75, all arm fittings), a sub-chassis (£240) and cross-brace (£45).

The Stack Audio upgrades are all designed to dissipate vibration, both air-borne and mechanical, so the arm and cartridge can work effectively. The goal was to improve upon the much-loved sound of the LP12, not change its character.

To evaluate the sound of the Serene upgrade, I grabbed an 80s-era LP12, which would probably set you back around £700-£1,000 depending on condition, and the arm. For this review, I used a Jelco TS350-S9, 9" arm, plus Audioquest Wildcat tonearm cable, with an Ortofon 2M Bronze hanging off the end of it. For LP12 fans, my base model also had a pre-Cirkus bearing and refurbished Valhalla internal power supply, along with a pre-1991 MDF baseboard, Linn plinth and motor corner brace.

I retained the arm, cable and cartridge, bearing and power supply, but added the Serene. I tried a host of rock and jazz vinyl to provide a broad overview of both turntables. What the Serene Linn offered was a more organic and tonally accurate presentation. Hence, during a bit of Jethro Tull, I heard a string being pulled and released instead of a simple twang; there was more information available around that note.

Percussion exhibited a new-found variation during drum hits on an Ella Fitzgerald track and I noticed during extended conga playing, the extra air and space around the instrument which aided reverb and enhanced the personality of the instrument.

On the Stack Linn, both guitar on the Jethro Tull LP and brass on the Ella Fitzgerald track lost an earlier clinical and claustrophobic upper-mid effect at higher volumes. And the higher the volume on the original Linn, the more you tended to wince. This welcome correction by the Stack upgrade meant that more information could flow from these instruments. That is, the ear sought out this area of the soundstage instead of trying to hide from them.

So where should you place the Stack Audio Serene, in the grand scheme of things? That is, how should it be viewed amongst the more well-known upgrade standards imposed upon the Linn LP12? Well, the Serene improves upon the Majik standard (priced at £2,900).

This, in itself, is quite an achievement. In short, this is a top-notch upgrade, offering great sound and value for money. All Linn owners need to take a look and, more importantly, a listen. ●

VERDICT 9

PROS Focused bass, midrange transparency, value for money, tonality
CONS Nothing

#12 THE VELVET UNDERGROUND
SISTER RAY

The Velvets' second album dragged rock music to new places. Gary Tipp couldn't hit it sideways

After 59 seconds of relative calm, *European Son*, the final track on The Velvet Underground's debut album, is abruptly interrupted by an almighty crash before mutating into a six-minute burst of frenetic, avant jazz-like experimentation. The 'crash' was created by John Cale smacking a stack of dishes with a metal chair and the track was a discordant precursor to what was to come; the unforgiving methamphetamine onslaught of *White Light/White Heat*.

After the disappointing sales of *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, the no-holds-barred follow-up witnessed the band going all out for the jugular in terms of anti-commerciality. Guitarist Sterling Morrison confirmed as much: "We were all pulling in the same direction. We may have been dragging each other off a cliff, but we were all definitely going in the same direction." Cale, meanwhile, described it as "a very rabid record. The first one had some gentility, some beauty. The second one was consciously anti-beauty."

STAINING THE CARPET

Sister Ray clocks in at 17 minutes 29 seconds, and is the purest distillation of the Reed-Cale-Morrison-Tucker line-up. Recorded in a single improvised jam, the foursome agreed to keep playing whatever, unlike the recording engineer, who left the studio mid-song in disgust ("You do this. When you're done, call me") and by the end of the track had dragged rock music to a previously unexplored place, clearing a path for its infinite possibilities.

Reed provided lead vocals and guitar, Morrison rhythm and Tucker drums, while Cale dispensed with his bass and viola, and played an organ through a distorted guitar amp. "It was competition," Cale proclaimed. "Everyone was hell-bent on being heard."

The Velvets weren't just about the sonics, and Lou Reed again invites us to a sordid street opera set in uptown New York. He said of the nodded-out narrative: "It was built around this story I wrote about this scene of debauchery and decay. I like to think of Sister Ray as a transvestite smack dealer. The situation is a bunch of drag queens taking some sailors home with them, shooting up on smack and having this orgy when the police appear."

White Light/White Heat was the last Velvets album that founding member Cale appeared on, with Reed laying down an 'it's me or him' ultimatum to the rest of the band. After Cale's departure, without his experimental edges, the Velvets were a fundamentally different band; nonetheless, they continued to play *Sister Ray* live. *The Complete Matrix Tapes* boxset, released fully on vinyl last year, contains three versions of the track, including one epic take that falls just short of the 40-minute mark.

Brian Eno once said that while The Velvet Underground's 'Banana' album sold only 30,000 copies in its early years, "everyone who bought one of those copies started a band." *Sister Ray* can also lay claim to holding a tremendous sway over aspiring rock stars. The Buzzcocks, for instance, were formed after placing an ad for musicians that carried one stipulation – they had to like *Sister Ray*. ●

"It was a competition. Everyone was hellbent on being heard..."

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